



PHD

'New' Femininities in the Culture of Intoxication

Exploring Young Women's Participation in the Night-Time Economy, in the Context of Sexualised Culture, Neo-Liberalism and Postfeminism

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**‘New’ femininities in
the culture of intoxication:
Exploring young women’s participation in the night-time economy,
in the context of sexualised culture, neo-liberalism and
postfeminism**



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A thesis submitted for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy

University of Bath

The School of Management

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Skeggs's words sum up everything I feel about doing this thesis. And here, I want to thank those people who have, in one way or another, personally and professionally, been part of the process in making it happen.

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Abstract

The thesis explores current debates around postfeminism and neoliberalism, and young women's articulations of femininity within the context of young women's excessive drinking practices. Alcohol plays a key role in UK culture today, and for young people, getting drunk is an accepted, expected and indeed normalised part of a night out in the current 'culture of intoxication'. It is also a space for enacting highly visible displays of gender, femininities and class, and one that represents an important 'space of attention' for exploring contemporary subjectivity. As such this space provides a productive source for carrying out in-depth analysis of how young women negotiate and manage 21st century femininities in the UK.

Data is provided in the form of white working-class women's accounts of excessive drinking in various drinking venues within the county of Hampshire, England. Thirty-three women, aged between 18 and 24 years, took part in several phases of data collection, and these include individual interviews, friendship group discussions, and ethnographic methods. I employed a version of Foucauldian discourse analysis to identify key themes and discourses in the young women's talk, and note how young women use excessive alcohol for confidence within what has become a drinking culture of hyper-sexuality, where the emphasis is on the traditional male gaze, but also and possibly even more powerfully, the postfeminist female gaze.

The young women draw on a number of discourses to construct drunkenness as a routine part of going out, and how the female gaze plays an important role in 'mirroring' and/or 'othering' women in terms of their feminine recognition. Furthermore, the women draw on postfeminist discourses to emphasise how painful and hard it is becoming a young female subject today.

Chapter One: Introduction

1.1 Introduction

Alcohol has long been one of the most popular chemicals used by human beings to enhance their moods, and it has been one of the most widespread throughout history (Heath 1995). Alcohol is ubiquitous, and this means there are multiple meanings and ways of talking about its consumption, both historically and cross-culturally, and within research disciplines. Yet, despite the extensive way in which alcohol has been talked about, most work, particularly in medical and sociological research, focused on the negative and abusive use of alcohol. This focus took a problems-oriented perspective (i.e. alcohol is seen as a public health issue with alcohol-related harm causing social, health and economic burden), ignoring the fact that drinking is essentially a social act, performed in a recognised social context, and is often used to evoke a pleasurable and desirable effect (Sheehan and Ridge 2001). Comparatively little had been published from a positive perspective (Douglas 1987), and 'pleasure' in drinking remains a relatively understudied phenomenon (Peele 1999). Furthermore, it has been suggested that while there may be a voluminous literature on medical and health studies from a variety of disciplines including psychology, sociology, criminology and cultural studies, these disciplines have a tendency to consider alcohol, drinking and drunkenness in contradictory ways with very little dialogue existing between them (Jayne, Holloway, and Valentine 2006).

Women's alcohol consumption has also been the focus of interest, concern and even hysteria for centuries. During recent decades, this focus has cultivated a series of 'moral panics', often promoted by the mass media, of 'the ignorance and prejudices of a world in which there persists a chronic antipathy towards the use of alcohol by women' (Plant 1997:viii). Plant and Plant (2006) point out how deeply rooted disapproval of women's drinking appeared to be in the culture of most, if not all countries where people do drink. And many ethnographers and writers on the subject of drinking observe that in the majority of societies alcohol is considered more suitable for men than for women (SIRC 1998). Portrayals of men's alcohol consumption and alcohol problems have often been contrasted with those of female drinkers in several important ways; men's alcohol consumption has been considered primarily as a normal 'male activity' (Mullen et al. 2007; Otto 1981), and men's alcohol problems treated as a 'social fact' of masculine excess (Fillmore 1984). Whereas not drinking, or being a light drinker, has been associated with femininity (Carlson 2008; Plant, Plant, and Mason 2002). In this regard, research on gender and alcohol has a tendency to focus on men's accounts of drinking, showing how they associate drinking with

masculinity and traditional masculine identities (de Visser and Smith 2007; Gough and Edwards 1998; Mullen et al. 2007; Tomsen 1997). The relationship between women and alcohol, on the other hand, has been both fraught and complicated, with femininity and alcohol being considered 'unsuitable bedfellows' (Rúdólfssdóttir and Morgan 2009:493).

Nonetheless, in the UK today 'young women have been hyper-actively positioned in the context of a wide range of social, political and economic changes of which they themselves appear to be the privileged subjects' McRobbie (2009:59). And by inserting and integrating 'women' in these processes of change, various cultural aspects have, in the UK, been deemed 'feminized' (Adkins 2002), including alcohol consumption. Alcohol plays a key role in UK culture, and young women's alcohol consumption has significantly increased over the last 20-30 years, particularly in drinking over the recommended weekly limits (Smith and Foxcroft 2009). Although this increase is reported to have peaked around the millennium (Measham and Østergaard 2009), British women, aged 16-24 years, remain the heaviest female episodic or 'binge' drinkers (NHS 2011), favouring Friday and/or Saturday nights in their pursuit of 'determined drunkenness' (Measham 2004a). Despite the intense scrutiny women's increasing alcohol consumption has come under in the past decade (in the UK press and governmental policies) there appears to be little feminist work on women's drinking *per se* (Day, Gough, and McFadden 2004); feminist researchers have examined media constructions of gender more generally (e.g., Gill 2007, 2009d; McRobbie 1991a, 2004a; Ringrose and Walkerdine 2008; Ticknell et al. 2003), but there is very little literature on contemporary young women, femininity and their consumption of high levels of alcohol.

The few studies that have explored young women, femininity and their consumption of high levels of alcohol, in terms of either representations of gender and excessive alcohol drinking (Griffin et al. 2008; Lyons and Willott 2008); femininities and contexts of alcohol consumption (Montemurro and McClure 2005; Sheehan and Ridge 2001), or the moral panic surrounding women's drinking in the media (Day, Gough, and McFadden 2004; Jackson and Tinkler 2007), all point to this being an important site/cross roads for exploring contemporary subjectivity. And, in particular, young women's sense making of subjectivity through the context of neoliberalism, postfeminism, consumerism and the UK's 'culture of intoxication' (Measham and Brain 2005).

1.2 Aims of the study

This research investigates certain articulations of femininity as they manifest themselves within contemporary British drinking cultures. I am arguing that the voices of young women

drinkers have been, and still are, absent from the discourses 'about' them; this led to my initial central questions being: what do young women get out of drinking excessively, and how does this relate to current feminist debates? And how can contemporary drinking cultures help us make sense/understand what McRobbie (1993) calls 'changing modes of femininity'?

During the course of my research I have often been asked 'What is your research about?' I have received various comments and substantial feedback from my supervisors during this time, but two comments are particularly poignant in answering this question; the first was made by a colleague in 2009:

"I went to a dinner party last night and consumed quite a bit of alcohol. In terms of the amount I drank you could call me a binge drinker, but a dinner party is portrayed quite differently to an evening out 'on the lash'"

The second remark was made by both my husband and son when I explained my 'role' on a 'night out with the girls' [fieldwork study with a group of young women drinkers in 2009 and 2010]:

"You can't go out like that...what if you're seen by one of my mates? Those sorts of women get a name for themselves...I don't want anyone associating you with them.....you won't look very feminine, in fact you'll look like a tart.....If you must do it can't you go out of town where nobody knows you?"

The key elements I am addressing in my research are highlighted in these narratives – that of the context of intoxication, and the bias attached to gender in drinking practices: the double standard. The remark my husband made is particularly notable as he knows I do not drink alcohol, yet his concern was with my appearance and how I would be perceived by 'others'. In focusing on femininities and alcohol consumption, this thesis provides an insight into contemporary constructions of femininity and the meanings drinking holds for a localised group of young women. I will also contribute to attempts to theorise the social position of contemporary young women from a feminist perspective. I do this by building a picture of how women have, and continue to be, constructed and objectified, by government and the media; how these constructions/representations attempt to control women's drinking, especially excessive consumption, in UK society; and how women negotiate their sense of selves within this context.

Furthermore, as McRobbie (2009) has pointed out, government discourse today addresses young women as privileged; and having benefited from equal opportunities in the education system, women are encouraged to avoid low paid and traditionally gendered jobs such as hairdressing. Therefore, what happens to those young women who do 'choose' to take up hairdressing [as many of my participants have]? Does she then become an object of concern? And what are the ethics of 'success' by which these young women are judged? If 'to be somebody' takes place in the context of neoliberalism and this is understood in relation to a discourse of continuous self-reflection and transformation, then how does one become a young female subject? Is it such an impossible task as both Walkerdine (2004) and Griffin (2005) suggest?

From a theoretical perspective, I argue that the concepts of power, social control and resistance found within feminist post-structural theoretical frameworks have the potential to assist in understanding and contextualising the responses of young women in my study.

1.3 Thesis structure

The next two chapters provides the milieu for this study; in chapter two, I explore some of the theories and concepts of contemporary femininity(ies) and the way in which the politics of gender, sexuality, class and location in contemporary culture is, in many places at the moment, distinctively neoliberal and postfeminist (Gill and Scharff 2011). I also set out my theoretical framework, in which I take a feminist post-structuralist perspective and draw on aspects of Foucault's work in relation to the construction of gendered identities.

Chapter three discusses how young women's alcohol drinking has become a socially salient issue in the UK today; and how female 'binge' drinking, constructed as a British disease, has been 'exported' to other countries. I then introduce Measham and Brain's (2005) idea of the UK's emerging 'culture of intoxication', of which 'binge' drinking is a product. I consider the alcohol industry's role in developing and promoting this culture, followed by an examination of the UK media, government and academic responses to young people's participation, showing how neoliberalism and postfeminism form the backdrop of these responses. In summary, I identify some of the gaps in the literature and make suggestions as to why current policies to reduce high levels of drinking are failing to have an effect. These chapters highlight the need for research that explores young women sense-making of feminine identities through drinking practices.

In chapter four I continue my feminist poststructuralist theme by explaining the rationale for using my chosen research strategy and design before discussing how I recruited participants to take part in the study, and how my fieldwork unfolded in practice. I then outline the process of data analysis I used to facilitate understanding of how the study's findings were reached. In this chapter I also elaborate on ethical considerations and issues, and reflect upon my role in the research and the challenges I encountered during the research process.

Part two of this thesis (chapters five through to seven) presents the study's findings, based on friendship group and interview data, ethnographic observation and visual imagery. The three chapters are organised around three main themes: 'Alcohol as Prescriptive', 'Alcohol as Enabler', and 'Alcohol as Provocateur'. Within each theme I identify a number of discourses that constitute how young women 'manage' 21st century femininity in the UK.

Finally, in Chapter eight, I draw together my key findings, as presented in chapters five, six and seven, and highlight the relevance of these findings to existing theoretical and empirical knowledge. The key themes structure this chapter and are situated within the context of the theoretical framework I outline in chapter two. These central themes are grounded in the implications of young women's constructions of femininity and sense of 'self' in the context of excessive drinking, and whether their use of 'drinking spaces' can be theorised as gendered resistance, repression or a combination of both. I draw upon feminist poststructural theoretical perspectives to facilitate a nuanced and theoretical understanding of these key findings in this regard, and highlight the theoretical and empirical contribution of my thesis.

Chapter Two: 'Making sense' of contemporary young women, femininity and excessive drinking

2.1 An introduction to postfeminism, neoliberalism and consumption

In the last two decades, young women have 'never had it so good' (Economist 2010). Benefiting from feminism and equal opportunities legislation young women are excelling in work and education; they also have greater access to public space, including drinking spaces, and, on the surface of it, more opportunities to experience themselves as agentic sexual subjects (Gill and Arthurs 2006; Jackson and Tinkler 2007; Renold and Ringrose 2011). Young women 'appear to have it all' (Harris 2004a: xvii), yet some feminist academics do not see freedom but new forms of discipline enabled through a rhetoric of 'freedom'.

These new forms of femininity can be understood as part of 'postfeminism'. Postfeminism is a term used to represent a variety of issues, but here I am drawing on Angela McRobbie and Rosalind Gill's work in particular to describe it as a new kind of anti-feminist sentiment. However, rather than representing the 'backlash', introduced by the media in the 1970s and 1980s, and designed to undermine feminist goals and achievements (Faludi 1992), I refer to a 'new' form of post-feminism; a 'postfeminism' that draws on words such as 'empowerment' and 'choice' in suggesting a more individualistic discourse, and uses them, particularly within media and popular culture, as a type of 'substitute for feminism' (McRobbie 2009:1). Central to postfeminist culture is the idea that women have now become empowered consumers (Tasker and Negra 2007), and feminism is irrelevant; as Greer (1999/2007:5) puts it:

'The future is female, we are told. Feminism has served its purpose and should now eff off'

Yet, according to McRobbie (2007), these empowered young women are effectively exchanging feminist politics for what she calls a 'new form of sexual contract'. McRobbie (2009:54) describes this contract as a request to young women 'to come forward and make good use of the opportunity to work, to gain qualifications, to control fertility and to earn enough money to participate in consumer culture'. However, as McRobbie explains, this suggestion, that young women have now won the battle for equality, is pretence, since their 'membership' is conditional - they can only participate as long as they do not threaten the gender order.

Like McRobbie (2004c), Gill sees postfeminism as simultaneously articulating and repudiating feminist ideas, making contemporary constructions of gender relations profoundly contradictory. For example, Gill argues that young women are 'hailed through a discourse of 'can-do' girl power, yet at the same time their bodies are powerfully inscribed as sexual objects' (Gill 2008b:442).

In different ways both Gill and McRobbie see postfeminism as a coming together of a complex and contradictory set of understandings and practices that include a simultaneous drawing on and refuting of feminism; the construction of femininity as a bodily practice; a shift from sexual objectification to sexual subjectification – where women knowingly, and apparently choicefully, sexually objectify their bodies; and a focus on self-regulation, surveillance and improvement. Both locate these ideas within a globalised, deregulated society, with Gill in particular highlighting, with others the way postfeminism folds into neoliberal forms of governance (Gill 2008b; Gill and Scharff 2011; Gonick 2006:5)

A number of writers have explored neoliberalism to show the ways in which it has shifted away from being a political and economic rationality to a mode of governmentality that operates across different spheres (Brown 2005; Rose 1999c). Neoliberalism has come to dominate British politics and common sense notions of subjectivity (Kelly 2006), and as a form of governance it constitutes the ideal self as 'rational, self-managing, autonomous and enterprising' (Gill and Scharff 2011:5); improve themselves so that they may be responsible for their own welfare (Rose 1990, 1999a) and in doing so enabling governments to 'govern without governing' (Read 2009).

Gill (2007a:164) explains the similarities between postfeminism and contemporary neoliberalism as operating on at least three levels; first, they both appear to be structured by a current of individualism that has almost entirely replaced ideas of the social or political, or any idea of the individual being subjected to pressures, constraints or influence from outside themselves. Second, the autonomous, calculating, self-regulating neoliberal subject is very similar to the active, freely choosing, and self-inventing postfeminist subject. And third, it would seem that it is women who are required to work on and transform themselves, to regulate every aspect of their conduct, whilst presenting these actions as though freely chosen, certainly to a much greater extent than men; evidenced in, for example, McRobbie, the dominance of the makeover paradigm in which neoliberal discourses of femininity emphasise importance of choice, empowerment and (sexual) pleasure. At the same time, these discourses also entangle women in 'therapy culture', in which 'the self has become a project to be evaluated, advised, disciplined and improved' (Gill 2007a:156).

Consumption is a significant tool for neoliberal governance (see for example, the Right to Buy (your council house) policy of the Thatcher era), as economic, social and political changes of late modernity associated with neoliberal economics have given rise to increasingly individualised biographies and social agency, and a weakening of the structural constraints of gender, class, ethnicity and other social markers (Allen and Osgood 2009; Beck 1992; Giddens 1991). Individuals are no longer shaped by 'the citizen-forming devices of church, school and public broadcasting, but by commercial consumption regimes and the politics of lifestyle (Rose 1999b:46). The field of consumption has become central to the process of identity, with a shift from governing through society to governing through individuals' capacities for self-realization (Rose 1999b); and as he explains, individuals actively engage in the diverse roles of being a consumer and,

'these fuse the aim of manufacturers to sell products and increase market share with the identity experiments of consumers....Advertising images and television programmes interpenetrate in the promulgation of images of lifestyle, narratives of identity choice and the highlighting of the ethical aspects of adopting one or other way of conducting one's life. Practices and styles of aestheticized life-choice...previously the monopoly of cultural elites have been generalized in this new habitat of subjectification...[i.e.] the belief that individuals can shape an autonomous identity themselves through choices in taste, music, goods, style and habitus' (1999b:178)

In this way Rose highlights how the practice of consumption is intensely involved in self-creation, so that 'consumption practices also play a key role in the constitution, reproduction and transformation of identities' (Griffin et al. 2006:6). The 'subject' [of neoliberalism] is therefore 'supposed to be able to choose who they are' from an array of multiple discourses and positions (Walkerdine 2003:241). The 'everyone can be anyone' statement Ewen and Ewen (1982:187) suggests that; thus gender, class, ethnicity and other social markers are now, apparently, less significant in structuring the opportunities and identities available to young women. However, feminist scholars have problematised this, claiming it effectively masks the inequalities which exclude some young women from these free-for-all opportunities (McRobbie 2009; Ringrose 2007)

Neoliberalism is thus a form of 'compulsory' individualism where one must understand oneself as making free choices, whilst being vulnerable to sanctions if failing to make 'appropriate' choices, since holding the individual accountable for her own choices renders invisible the forms of social inequality that also shape consumer choices. Thus, individuals

who do not have access to resources are constituted as personally responsible for making 'bad choices' (Skeggs 2005a); or as Bauman (2007:25) puts it, they become 'flawed consumers' who lack the resources that socially approved consumer activity requires.

The interaction between neoliberalism and consumption has also been critiqued for the way in which it becomes a disciplinary regime for women. For while McRobbie (2011a) argues that whilst we can grant some degree of freedom or capacity to western women today in terms of what Foucault called day-to-day governmentality and liberation from tradition, at the same time, this becomes the means and measure of a new form of control for women. She argues that contemporary young womanhood now involves the active participation of the media and popular culture. With a new focus on 'self-reliance', on individualism and entrepreneurship, and on talent and competition (Rose 1999d), young women have come to occupy a key position as subjects worthy of investment. For example, McRobbie (2009) shows how, within the language of Britain's New Labour government, young women have become 'exemplary subjects' having benefited from the equal opportunities now available to them.

However, as McRobbie (2009, 2011a) points out, this 'joining of forces', across the media and political life, has led to young women becoming the objects of intense attention, and in appearing to be the 'privileged subjects', they are now required to become important to themselves. This is achieved through self-discipline and regulation, and being guided by the field of instruction and pleasure within the commercial domain (i.e., beauty, fashion, magazines, body culture, etc.). As women have more money now, their involvement as both workers and consumers, created new demand for unprecedented technologies and cultural products, which, in turn, created new social spaces and public visibility. Under the guise of 'free choice', by linking it to consumption, and the power of media and popular culture to 'shape' young women's needs through discourses of freedom and pleasure, young women further become 'intensively managed subjects of postfeminist, gender-aware biopolitical practices of new governmentality' (McRobbie 2009:60). Neoliberal governmentality thus produces contradictory impulses within which the neoliberal female subject is compelled to participate in society as both an enthusiastic consumer and as a self-controlled subject (Guthman 2009:193)

2.2 Girl power through the body?

From being assumed to be headed towards marriage, motherhood and limited economic participation, young women are now 'invited' to recognise themselves as 'privileged subjects of social change' (McRobbie 2009:58). This attribution of capacity has given rise to a number of celebratory discourses such as 'girl power', 'top girls' (McRobbie 2007) and 'can-do' girls (Harris 2004b).

The idea of 'Girl power', as an example of postfeminist discourse, spread in the 1990s when The Spice Girls (a British all girl pop singing group) promoted the idea as a re-appraisal of femininity and feminism; decked out in miniskirts, plunging necklines and high-heeled shoes, The Spice Girls sang of female solidarity, empowerment and agency. On the one hand, 'girl power' has been criticised as 'an objectifying and commoditising trap' that encourages women to buy 'into patriarchal stereotypes of female appearance and neo-liberal individualist principles' (Genz and Brabon 2009:76). Yet, in highlighting the complexity and contradictoriness of 'girl power', Aapola, Gonick and Harris (2005:39) suggest it provides a new articulation of young femininity and represents 'a feminist ideal of a new, robust, young woman with agency and a strong sense of self'. And, according to third-wave feminists Baumgardner and Richards (2000:137), the discourse of 'girl power' also enables young women to compete with men and attain equality without sacrificing all forms of 'pink packaged femininity'. As they explain, using the term 'Girlie', 'girl power' combines insider confidence within consumer culture with a reproductive re-appropriation of traditional accoutrements of femininity:

"Using makeup isn't a sign of our sway to the marketplace and the male gaze; it can be sexy, campy, ironic, or simply decorating ourselves without the loaded issues.... What we loved as girls was good and, because of feminism, we know how to make girl stuff work for us" (Baumgardner and Richards 2000:136)

2.2.1 New sexual subjectivities – femininity as sexual confidence

McRobbie might agree with Baumgardner and Richards's assertion that conventional ways of articulating femininity, such as lipstick and high heels, do not mean a woman is trapped by her femininity; as McRobbie (2009) says, femininity is now a matter of choice rather than obligation. But she does argue (2009) that surrounded by messages that suggest feminist struggles have ended, and with full equality for all women having been achieved, young women must negotiate 'the constant stream of incitements and enticements' promoting 'success, attainment, enjoyment, entitlement, social mobility and participation' (McRobbie

2009:57). This includes a particular style of 'girliness', which McRobbie argues is the 'pro-capitalist femininity-focused repertoire'; a style which third wavers such as Baumgardner and Richards might promote as a form of women's or girl-power, but a style McRobbie (2009:158) sees as playing 'directly into the hands of corporate consumer culture eager to tap into this market on the basis of young women's rising incomes'.

Furthermore, McRobbie notes how a postfeminist woman's bodily appearance is similar to patriarchal ideals of feminine beauty, just without the message of passivity that characterised portrayals of women some forty years ago (Friedan 1963). Similarly Gill argues that today's construction of femininity(ies) is organised around sexual confidence and autonomy with women depicted, largely in the media and popular culture, as knowing, active and desiring sexual subjects (Gill 2003:103), and that the increasingly frequent 'erotic' presentation of girls' and women's bodies in public spaces means that women are no longer seen as traditional passive objects of the patriarchal gaze; instead, they are now presented as active, desiring sexual subjects. Thus the sexual power and assertiveness that characterise such a discourse as 'girl power' are seen to be directly linked to their feminine identities (Genz and Brabon 2009).

It would seem that caring, nurturing and motherhood, once considered as central to femininity, have now been replaced, in today's media, by the idea that possession of a 'sexy' body is women's key (if not sole) source of identity. The body is presented as both a source of power, creating new subject positions such as the 'sexual entrepreneur' - agentic, free, sexy and always 'up for it' (Harvey and Gill 2011:56). And the ideas that 'sex is stylish, a source of physical pleasure, a means of creating identity, a form of body work, self-expression, and a quest for individual fulfilment' (Attwood 2006:86) are linked to new knowledges and new visual regimes, which, Gill (2003) argues, help bring into being the new, feisty, playful, desiring (heterosexual) subject.

Nonetheless, the body is also constructed as always unruly, requiring constant surveillance, monitoring and discipline in order to conform to the ever-narrower judgements of female attractiveness (Gill 2007a:149). Similarly, the postfeminist subject is an entrepreneur, incited to be compulsorily sexy and always 'up for it', yet positioned within discourses of beauty, desirability and sexual performance(s) that demand 'sex is work' (Harvey and Gill 2011); work that requires constant labour, discipline and 'microscopic attention to detail' (McRobbie 2009:66). Women must 'freely' choose to undertake all forms of beauty protocol, and in an increasingly sexualised culture, there is the expectation for women to constantly work on their bodies in order to perform a hyper-feminine, polished, sexy – yet classy – form of femininity.

Furthermore, as feminists such as Gill and McRobbie suggest, femininity is aligned with a specific idealised and eroticised aesthetic showing a slim, young, white, able body which is derivative of both 'traditional' femininity (and everything 'girlie') and mainstream heterosexual pornography – overly large artificial looking breasts, high heels, excessive make-up, and scantily (un)dressed (Levy 2005). This effectively excludes fat women, older women, black women, disabled women, lesbians, and just about every woman who does not 'fit' the criteria of these narrow standards of heterosexual female beauty and attractiveness which have become shorthand for 'sexiness'. Moreover, the work involved in disciplining the body to meet these standards is 'made knowable in new ways', making invisible the 'pain, anxiety, expense and low self-esteem' that young women suffer (Gill 2009d:105), since they are 'freely choosing' to do so. As Gill says, the idea of individual choice has become a postfeminist *mantra*, and under an illusion that they are empowered to *choose*, young women undertake numerous practices to make their bodies beautiful. And whilst in 'lads' magazines (e.g., *Loaded*, *Nuts*, *Zoo*, *FHM*) sex is discussed through a vocabulary of youthful pleasure-seeking, indicating a blurring of boundaries between pornography and other genres, sex in girls' and women's magazines (e.g., *Cosmopolitan*, *Glamour*, *Grazia*) is constructed as something requiring constant attention, discipline, self-surveillance and emotional labour (Gill 2007a:151). Practices, such as applying wax to the sensitive area of the female bikini line (genital) and pulling the hairs out by their roots, are discursively (re)constructed as 'pampering', yet as Gill (2009d) expresses, and many women would agree, there is nothing indulgent about these practices.

Yet this work is constructed through discourses of agency and choice and empowerment – as pleasing selves (Gill 2003; Lazar 2006; McRobbie 2009); and part of women's active choice to participate in sexual subjectification and objectify themselves is through a 'look-don't-touch' style that rather than being harmless and empowering, 'reveals the ways in which today's young women are returned to "babe-land", with and without their complicity' (Ross and Moorti 2003:100). An example of this can be seen in the range of French Connection t-shirts aimed at women (Gill 2003:101) (see overleaf):



Figure 1: French Connection's generic t-shirt – "fcuk me" or "fit chick unbelievable knockers" (Gill 2003:101)

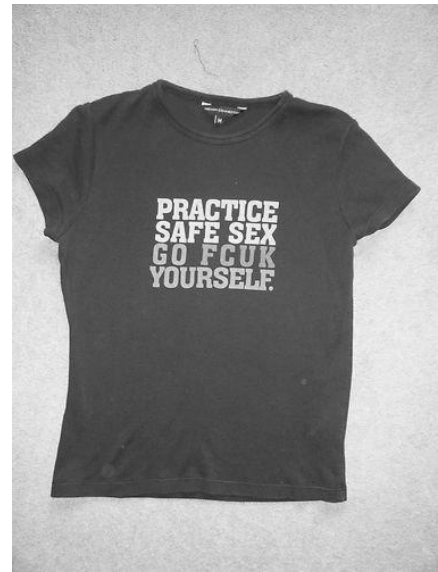


Figure 2: An example of FCUK t-shirt design for women.

The pleasuring yourself 'It's about me!' standpoint, Lazar (2009:375) argues, is an identity produced through a postfeminist 'entitlement to live a self-absorbed, hedonistic and narcissistic lifestyle based upon consumerist values', but it's more than just about 'me'; 'meanings of choice and individual freedom become wed to images of sexuality in which women apparently choose to be seen as sex objects because it suits their liberated interests' to do so (Goldman, Heath, and Smith 1991:338), and Amy-Chinn (2006) sums up this double-edged postfeminist emphasis in the title of her article about lingerie advertising: 'This is just for Me(n)' (see figure 3).

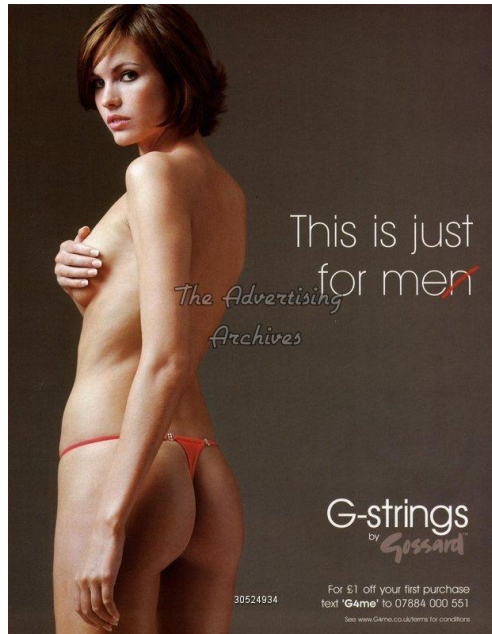


Figure 3: Gossard advertisement 2002 (The Advertising Archives)

As Gill (2009d:101) explains, citing Amy-Chinn's (2006) paper, in connecting 'me' and 'men', there is no necessary contradiction (or difference) between what ('I') women want and what men might want (of 'me').

Furthermore this 'sexual agency' becomes a form of regulation because it *requires* young women to take up these subject positions. Just as Rose talks about an obligation to be free and choiceful, so too within postfeminism we see an obligation to be free and sexy – women should not only be beautiful, but sexy, sexually knowledgeable (practised) and always “up for it” (Gill 2008a:35).

Thus the emergence of new female and sexual subjectivities have developed alongside a 'reinvigoration of inequalities and the emergence of new forms and modalities of power' (Gill and Scharff 2011:1), in part enabled, as McRobbie (2011b) suggests, through a 'double entanglement'; in which postfeminism draws on a neoliberal vocabulary of 'empowerment' and 'choice', and offering these to women as substitutes for more radical feminist political action. Instead 'an overarching framework of capacity, freedom, change and gender equality' works to conceal emerging modes of gender regulation, a new sexual contract' (McRobbie 2009:57), and the requirements of this 'new deal' for women include: occupying 'privileged spaces of attention' (positions of visibility and agency) through participation in education, employment and consumer culture; abandoning a critique of patriarchy and

political activity; and engaging in a range of practices which are 'both progressive but also consummately and reassuringly feminine' (McRobbie 2009:57).

This McRobbie calls the 'post-feminist masquerade', in which for women to be successful in areas of work, employment and public life, once marked out as masculine domains, they must engage with the fashion-beauty complex under the pretence of 'own choice' and gender equality; freely choosing to get endlessly and repetitively 'done up' in order to mask their rivalry with men and conceal the competition they now pose (McRobbie 2009:67) since women are not obliged to undertake traditional feminine practices of beauty and fashion for male approval, they 'choose' to do so, and appropriate the 'look' exemplified by the 'so-called *fashionista*' (McRobbie 2009:67).

Masquerade is there to protect the gender order, but it is not men's reprisal that the woman in masquerade fears, rather it is the reprimanding structure of the beauty and fashion system (acting as an authoritative regime) that instils within women a sense of vulnerability, fragility, uncertainty and deep anxiety about the possible forfeiting of male desire through coming forward as a woman. And it is only by getting 'done up' that a woman can be sure that she will remain sexually desirable (McRobbie 2009:67). I suggest a similar argument can also be put forward for women's alcohol drinking, since their participation in the 'culture of intoxication' often leads to young women producing a 'hetero-hyper-sexy' form of femininity.

McRobbie's conceptualisation of the 'post-feminist masquerade' and its various incarnations – the well-educated working girl; the 'phallic girl' who, within the landscape of UK popular culture, culminates in the figure of the so-called 'ladette'; and the racialized global girl; are versions of 'coming-forwards': emergent and becoming subjectivities created through specific 'spaces of attention' (McRobbie 2009:90). Similarly, I suggest drinking culture is a space of attention in which the masquerade works paradoxically as a statement of supposed female empowerment and personal choice yet also as a 'triumphant gesture on the part of resurgent patriarchy' (McRobbie 2009:85). And I would argue that in today's drinking cultures, the demands on young women to be 'consummately and re-assuringly feminine' (McRobbie 2009:60-67) far outweigh any inclination to be a '(lad)-ette'.

2.2.2 Inequality and postfeminism/vilification of the working class woman

Postfeminist discourses emphasising empowerment through consumer choice are individualistic, and mask continuing social inequalities and exclusions in relation to class and gender, as well as 'race' and ethnicity, age, sexuality and disability (Gill 2007a; McRobbie 2009; Ringrose and Walkerdine 2008; Skeggs 1997). The culturally dominant feminine

beauty ideals marginalise those who are not white, slim, middle-class and heterosexual; and the prevalence on heterosexuality as the ideal feminine sexuality can be seen in McRobbie's (2009) and Scharff's (2011) work in which they highlight how the 'real lesbian' is reviled in much the same way as the repudiated feminist, 'frequently typecast as embodying bodily failure, hideousness or monstrosity' (McRobbie 2009:61-62).

McRobbie (2009:60) writes that the young woman [including her body] is now 'an intensively managed subject of post-feminist, gender-aware biopolitical practices of new governmentality'; she is effectively under the spot-light and 'constructed as a vanguard of new subjectivity' (Harris 2004b:1). However as I've discussed, this highly acclaimed neoliberal 'success' is not a reality for many young women and this 'failure' is seen in a discursive process of '*Othering*'; a categorisation of women as 'at risk'. Women are often seen as either most 'at risk' or those most likely to be risk-takers, and being 'at risk' is deemed as having made bad personal choices resulting in inappropriate consumption behaviours (Phipps 2006). And certainly this notion of being 'at risk' ties into ideas of postfeminist neoliberal autonomy and empowerment, and is clearly visible in British drinking cultures where traditional discourses of femininity (e.g., respectability and responsibility) come up against new 'sexualised' forms of feminine appearance. As Measham and Østergaard (2009:425) suggest, there is now a 'hypersexuality within the 21st century night-time economy', with alcohol consumption playing a significant role in constructing the identity of the post-feminist 'girl'.

According to a number of feminists, under neoliberalism, normative femininity is highly exclusionary, premised on middle-class ideals and experiences (e.g., Gill 2007a; Ringrose and Renold 2011; Kehily 2008); and its boundaries are constitutive of 'others': deviant and failed femininity which is in danger of slipping into unmanageable excess (e.g., hypersexuality, pregnancy, dropping out of school, or delinquency and violence (Ringrose and Walkerdine 2008:12)). Subsequently many working-class women become discursively constituted through negative discourses because of social and economic restraints. For example, Walkerdine, Lucey and Melody's (2001:189) analysis of early pregnancy in young women, points to the ways in which the regulation of femininity is related to sexuality, and how this works differently upon the bodies of working-class and middle-class girls, and they become 'each other's "Other"'; working class teenage mums are constructed by the middle-class girls as 'welfare scrounging single mothers', and this gives rise to competing discourses such as 'girl power' and 'girls at risk' (Aapola, Gonick, and Harris 2005; Harris 2004b). As McRobbie (2007:732) suggests, working class motherhood becomes vilified as a form of 'failed femininity'. Similarly, ladettes are portrayed as being either middle-class

and, for example, part of the 'Bridget Jones' syndrome (Harris 2001), or as ladettes who cannot eradicate their working-class associations; as Jackson and Tinkler (2007:255) describe, 'ladette' behaviours such as the excessive (drinking, smoking, sex), disruptive (social order), crude (swearing), aggressive (verbal and physical), 'open' (sexual), still remain associated with the 'least desirable', 'unrespectable' elements of working-class lifestyles (Skeggs 1997, 2004).

I theorise this classed aspect of postfeminism further in discussing how practices of the (female) self are imbued with bias and presupposition (section 2.3.4).

2.2.3 Summary

While women have always learned to look the part and be an object of the male gaze, what a number of feminist writers have proposed (Gill 2007a; McRobbie 2009; Walkerdine 2004) is it is the intensification of this demand on women to always look presentable, desirable and consumable – to be middle class, not working class, to be consumers not producers, to be heterosexual not lesbian, to be women not men, and to be feminine not masculine. And what is profoundly different about this obligation, to 'look' desirable and desiring, is it's all about choice as *productive* of subjectivity (Braun 2009). Achieving the 'look' is supposedly no longer about seeking male approval, rather, as Franklin and Lennox sang in 1985, it's about 'sisters [women] doin' it for themselves'; a discourse which emphasises autonomy and empowerment, yet, as Gill points out, one that cannot account for why, 'if women are just pleasing themselves, and following their own autonomously generated desires, the resulting valued look is so similar'? (2007a:154).

For young women, trying to refashion oneself, within neoliberal forms of governance, as successful postfeminist subjects, might involve undeniable pleasures in terms of lifestyle and consumption, but, at the same time, it is fraught with difficulties, contradictions and impossibilities. In my view, young women's increased visibility in leisure spaces has resulted in them being placed under an invisible yet intense spotlight, or in Foucauldian terms, under an inspecting gaze, which some young women interiorise as a form of surveillance over [and against] themselves. And whilst they are *required* to engage in specific practices of hyper-sexual femininity, the enormous pressure on them to 'get it right' ends up with them understanding their inability to 'make the mark' as their own failing - their own pathology. Unprecedented levels of scrutiny and 'hostile' surveillance of women's bodies means failure to achieve the norms of femininity essential for portraying success are often 'read back as problems with and for the woman herself' (Walkerdine 2004:4); young women are inevitably set up to fail (Gill 2008b). And no one really ends up feeling like a winner because the

impossibility of attaining these norms tends to keep even those who may appear successful feeling like they have fallen short of these ideals (Galvin 2006), particularly in relation to celebrity culture (Evans and Riley 2012); therefore, to 'become somebody' (Gonick 2003), the task of neo-liberalism, is, as Walkerdine (2004:24) puts it, an 'impossible task'.

In the discursive frameworks of both postfeminism and neoliberalism, young women may appear as sexually autonomous, self-regulating individuals who exist and operate within a world of liberation and self determination. However, as McRobbie (2004e, 2009) (and others) asserts, emergent codes of sexual freedom and hedonism associated with new femininities should be understood as new technologies of the self rather than celebratory expressions of changing female subjectivity. In order to analyse the paradoxical regulation of contemporary femininity further, and to explore the changing practices associated with young women's alcohol consumption as part of a much wider reconfiguration of class and gender in a neoliberal, postfeminist social order (Skeggs 2004), I use Foucault's work on power as my theoretical framework for making sense of this context .

2.3 Regimes of Power: Foucault's disciplinary technology and bio-power

2.3.1 Introduction

Feminists disagree about the usefulness of Foucault's work for feminist theory and practice (McLaren 2002), with some feminists such as Weedon (1997) and Sawicki (1991) arguing that his work is necessary in continuing feminist political practice, and others stating that the underlying assumptions of feminism are antithetical to Foucault's theoretical framework (Hartsock 1990). Nonetheless, Foucault has significantly influenced post-structural feminist theorising, and his theorisation of power and resistance are particularly pertinent to this feminist project. I therefore use this section to outline my theoretical framework.

First I explore feminist poststructural theoretical perspectives as a framework for understanding and contextualising my research findings presented in subsequent chapters. In doing so I provide a feminist take on Foucault's regimes of power, from his earlier work on bio-power, to his later theorisation of governmentality and technologies of the self, to show how power, operating within postfeminist and neoliberal rhetoric, can be understood in producing feminine identities in the UK's 'culture of intoxication'.

Foucault's theorising about power developed throughout his life, and different readings of his theorisation can, in part, be attributed to the evolving nature of his work, something writers

often refer to as his 'earlier' or 'later' work in emphasising how Foucault's own understandings about the self shifted over his short lifetime (1926-84). And whilst his earlier work emphasised the external constraints on the power of individuals via the disciplines, his later work demonstrates 'the changes in his thinking around issues of agency and subjectivity' (Evans, Riley, and Shankar 2010:120).

Feminists have, in the main, concentrated on Foucault's earlier theories of power and the body rather than his concept of technologies of the self (McNay 1992). From this perspective, women who drink alcohol in public would be understood as being kept in a position of 'docility' by a respect for the 'law' of gender that effectively allows her access to this male-dominated cultural space on condition that she positions herself as object for the male-gaze. In relation to my analysis this perspective offers some utility for understanding my data; however, its focus on 'docility' is not enough as it does not allow for individual agency and the 'self'.

In Foucault's later life he noted that he may have concentrated 'too much on the technology of domination and power' (Foucault 1988a:19), and recognising the 'analytical limitations of his earlier account of the individual as a passive body' he went on to theorise a 'technology of the self'. He defined technology of the self 'as a certain number of practices and techniques through which individuals *actively* fashion their own identities' (McNay 1992:3); nonetheless, agency is only practicable within the discourses available in a particular context. Foucault's later work thus provides different tools for theorising alcohol consumption and discourses of femininity.

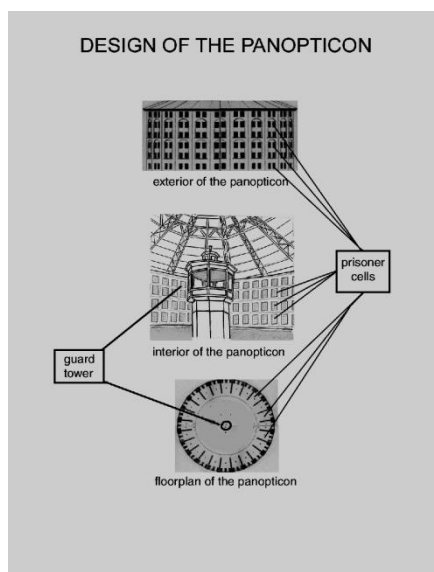
I suggest these theorisations of power complement each other and I use Foucault's earlier concepts of power to illustrate how the UK's media and governments, as social institutions, help regulate the production and perception of what it means to be a female drinker. And, in emphasizing how the media and government are only 'the terminal forms power takes' (Foucault 1976/1998:92), I show how Foucault's concepts of governmentality and technologies of the self allow for an analysis that focuses on the female drinker as the subject of her own objectification.

2.3.2 Foucault's early discourses on the self and his ideas of disciplinarity

Feminist theory and Foucauldian thinking that centres around his earlier work, focuses on his first volume of *The History of Sexuality* (Foucault 1976/1998) and *Discipline and Punish* (Foucault 1977). In these accounts, Foucault outlines the shift from 'sovereign power' (a monarch's power over his people) to a 'disciplinary power' whereby power was exercised

'bottom-up' instead of 'top-down'. This ascending analysis of power operates through individuals exercising power over each other through social surveillance, and whilst 'rules' still applied, it is social norms (rules) that facilitate self-surveillance, producing subjected and practised bodies (Foucault 1977).

Unlike sovereign power which was deductive, 'disciplinary power' is *productive*, producing the individual and knowledge about the individual which can then be used as a normative standard by which individuals can monitor their own behaviour. Foucault illustrates this idea using the model of Bentham's Panopticon prison to explain how macro-level social structures can be maintained through micro-level cultural practices (Aitchison 2003:21). The Panopticon was designed to allow prison guards a constant view of all prisoners, in their cells, without their knowing who is being watched at any one time. This form of surveillance evokes prisoners to adopt a form of self-surveillance and self-policing in the fear that their behaviour might be perceived as deviating from the permitted norms of behaviour.



Figures 4 & 5: Examples of Bentham's concept of the Panopticon, or all-seeing inspection-house, for penitentiaries, asylums, schools, hospitals and factories (Pease-Watkin 2003)

The combination of the possibility of always being seen (imposed visibility) and not being able to see (creating perpetual uncertainty), operates as a form of social control, as Foucault (1977:201-3) describes:

‘to induce in the inmate a state of conscious and permanent visibility that assures the automatic functioning of power....the surveillance is permanent in its effects, even if it is discontinuous in its actions.....He who is subjected to a field of visibility, and who knows it, assumes responsibility for the constraints of power; he makes them play spontaneously upon himself; he inscribes in himself the power relation in which he simultaneously plays both roles; he becomes the principle of his own subjection’

As Aitchison (2003:21) explains, this form of surveillance operates in influencing our behaviour in everyday life, ‘where we are subject to the gaze of others and where we can be ‘Othered’ by the gaze’. The gaze of others often evokes self-policing behaviour, with the fear of being ‘Other’ encouraging conformity to dominant codes and behaviours of society. As I envisage, the young female, unsure whether she will be watched when she goes out in public, begins to watch herself; she behaves as if she is being watched and as such conforms to the explicit (and implicit) rules of the particular situation she is in. And from a feminist perspective, disciplinary power facilitates theorisation of the way in which gender norms operate in constraining the behaviour of young women in the context of ‘going out’ (drinking in the night-time economy). As I will argue, in my analysis section, this context is a site in which young women are in a self-sustaining cycle of surveillance – being watched, watching each other, and watching themselves (Berger 1990); it might be ‘just a gaze’, but discipline works in that young women may feel such an inspecting gaze and interiorise it to a point where they become their own supervisor. Thus, young women may appear to choose or conform to normative femininity or their production of a ‘socially acceptable’ femininity by, for example, not wearing too short dress, or not drinking too much alcohol, and self-policing their own behaviour while they are out in order to avoid any risk of being deemed promiscuous or ‘laddie’. Foucault’s conceptualisation of ‘disciplinary power’ highlights the way in which some young women come to regulate their own behaviour, omitting the need for coercive controls to induce them to behave in a certain way.

In both ‘Discipline and Punish’ and the ‘History of Sexuality’ (volume one), Foucault presents the idea that sexuality is not innate, but the effect of historically specific power relations. Feminists have used this explanation to highlight how ‘women’s experience is controlled within certain culturally determined images of feminine sexuality’ (McNay 1992:3). Foucault died in 1984, but had he proceeded as intended, he is likely to have demonstrated how women’s bodies are controlled through a set of discourses and practices (biopower) which govern not only their bodies and health, but their education and welfare too (Sawicki 1991).

Foucault's emphasis on a disciplined useful body (docile bodies) has been used by feminists to describe contemporary practices of femininity, later amended by Foucault in favour of a less reductionist conception of the subject and power in his writing on the technologies of the self (Deveaux 1996:214). Second wave feminists incorporate Foucault's metaphoric use of Bentham's 'Panopticon' as a basis for an analysis of what they call 'techniques of femininity' (e.g., Bartky 2003). However, I share Deveaux's view that whilst feminists' use of the docile bodies paradigm may draw attention to the ways in which women's bodies serve as a 'locus for the social construction of femininity' (Deveaux 1996:216), this perspective does not include how women feel about their bodies, their appearance, and social norms. Nonetheless, the work of feminists such as Bartky and Bordo who engage with Foucault's earlier work can help theorise young women's alcohol drinking.

Bordo (2003), for example, uses a modified version of Foucault's 'docile bodies' paradigm in her work on women's hunger, and I use this to demonstrate how women's alcohol drinking has been similarly linked to transgression. Bordo notes that the depiction of women eating, particularly in a 'sensuous surrender to rich, exciting food', is taboo; imagining a food advertisement of a young, attractive woman indulging as freely as a man, she says would violate 'deeply sedimented expectations', and would be regarded by many as 'disgusting and transgressive' (Bordo 2003:110). It would seem that, in this regard, transgression has become sexualised, yet what is also significant, as Bordo (2003:161) points out, is that this 'anxiety over women's uncontrollable hungers, sexual or otherwise, appear to peak during periods when women are becoming independent and are asserting themselves politically and socially'. Similarly, I suggest, there has been considerable concern recently over young women's 'uncontrollable' alcohol drinking, notably from those involved in biomedical and 'health' focused social science fields which advise UK government-led policy, and the UK media.

This observation was reinforced when I carried out a basic cursory literature search on the internet using the terms 'women AND alcohol', which yielded references to a vast amount of literature on alcohol 'abuse' and 'risky' drinking amongst women. This is something Foucault (1976/1998:104) might perhaps refer to as a 'hysterization of women's bodies', which leads us to think of the female body as firstly highly sexual and then as an object of medical knowledge. In examining more recent research, I found examples of work associating women's consumption of alcohol with the practice of other 'risky' or 'undesirable/transgressive' behaviours such as unprotected sex (Hibell et al. 2009; Piombo and Piles 1996; Standerwick et al. 2007), sexual violence (Abbey 2002; Finney 2004), the risk of developing cancers (Allen et al. 2009), and low fertility and foetal/child 'defects' (Soyal

et al. 2007; Velleman and Templeton 2007). Yet, as Armstrong (2003:190) points out, 'the emergence of this diagnosis (foetal alcohol syndrome) demonstrates some of the ways in which disease may be used to exert social control, at once expressing and reinforcing social ideologies'. It seems this 'obsession' with pathologizing female drinking practices may say more about the persistence of gendered, puritanical morality than it does about the existence or magnitude of a 'problem' (Armstrong 1998).

Whilst I found my analogy with Bordo's example of women's eating useful in demonstrating how women's alcohol drinking practices increase government and medical intervention, it did leave me feeling a sense of disempowerment on the part of young women. Where is the 'incitement to discourse' that Foucault (1976/1998:17) speaks of – the registering of resistance?

A second wave of feminist literature has used Foucault's later work on power, based on the idea that 'where there is power, there is resistance' (Foucault 1976/1998:95). In his later work, Foucault challenges the assumption that power is a 'top down force', and some feminists have used Foucault's theorisation of a 'bottom up' approach to power to imply active resistance to discourses and practices that subordinate women (Hekman 1990). It is in his later work that Foucault broadens his theorisation of power, in the form of 'technologies of the self', to allow scope for resisting oppressive 'technologies of power'. In the next section I explore 'technologies of self', starting with Foucault's notion of governmentality.

2.3.3 Governmentality

Foucault's work on governmentality does not represent a break with his earlier work which emphasized micro-strategies of power, rather it provides 'the balance required to intersect micro- and macro- level analyses' (Macleod and Durrheim 2002:44). In his work on governmentality, Foucault applied the same analytic on the macro-level that he had done earlier to the micro-levels of power – one which emphasises *practices* of government, and he used the terms government and governmentality in inter-related ways. Foucault defined government as the 'conduct of conduct' (Gordon 1991:2). And described as techniques and procedures for directing human behaviour (Foucault 1997), governmentality is simultaneously concerned with individualised subjectivity on the one hand, and objectification on the other (through the operation of bio-power, the individual is transformed into an object or docile body); in other words, interlinking the micro-effect of power (e.g., technologies of the self) with the macro-levels of power (e.g., government, society, media

which implicate structure and regulatory control). Central to Foucault's theorisation of governmentality was that technologies of the self were formed alongside the technologies of domination – 'ways in which human beings come to understand and act upon themselves within certain regimes of authority and knowledge, and by means of certain techniques directed to self-improvement' (Rose, O'Malley, and Valverde 2006:90).

Attempts to interlink these two regimes of power without privileging one or the other can be seen in the way contemporary UK governments, in their attempts to tackle the problem of 'binge' drinking, try to 'govern at a distance' (Miller and Rose 1990). By trying to govern too much, by perhaps imposing unrealistic sanctions on alcohol consumption, the government might end up not governing at all, as one's actions might 'provoke results contrary to those desired' (Foucault 1991:242). This shift in the role of government can be seen today as neo-liberal forms of governance and regulation at work; government still has its aims and values, but tries to instil a sense of empowerment and responsabilization in individuals. In other words, if individuals are empowered to make their own decisions (about how much they drink), then they will also be considered responsible for the outcome of such a decision. This can be understood as a constraint on freedom: one is free to act *responsibly* and should become 'entrepreneurs of themselves' (Rose, O'Malley, and Valverde 2006:90).

As I discuss in the next chapter, government policy on alcohol consumption renders alcohol use governable by choice; drinkers, regarded as consumers in a world of consumerism, are encouraged through official discourse to make rational choices and self-determine how much alcohol is risky and harmful, for example:

'It is up to individuals to decide whether to drink alcohol and how much they drink. It is not government's role to restrict this, unless drinking would take place under circumstances that place this individual or others at unreasonable risk' (DoH 2008:20,3.3)

The government uses neoliberal subjectivity of 'autonomous choosing selves' as their 'ideal - to construct individuals who choose not to drinking sensibly as 'those who binge drink (drink to get drunk)' (DoH 2008:9). Thus 'binge drinkers' become 'failed subjects', and as individuals who fail to co-operate, they 'create a *moral* problem which requires remedial action' (Gledhill 2004:340). Action includes giving local councils more power, the provision of 'drunk tanks' to divert the intoxicated from busy A&E departments, and further enforcement from the police (Cameron 2012).

O'Malley and Valverde (2004:27) talk about the way in which governing discourses around tackling 'risky' alcohol use rarely mention 'pleasure', 'enjoyment', 'excitement' or any other such synonym; pleasure, it would seem, is made contingent on rational moderation. The alcohol industry promotes drinking through images of fun, enjoyment and freedom, but these are always accompanied by the recurring catchphrase 'drinkaware.co.uk for the facts'¹ which emphasizes pleasure as equating to a form of 'rational' and 'responsible' enjoyment. Once alcohol is no longer rationally and responsibly consumed it becomes problematic, and so does enjoyment.

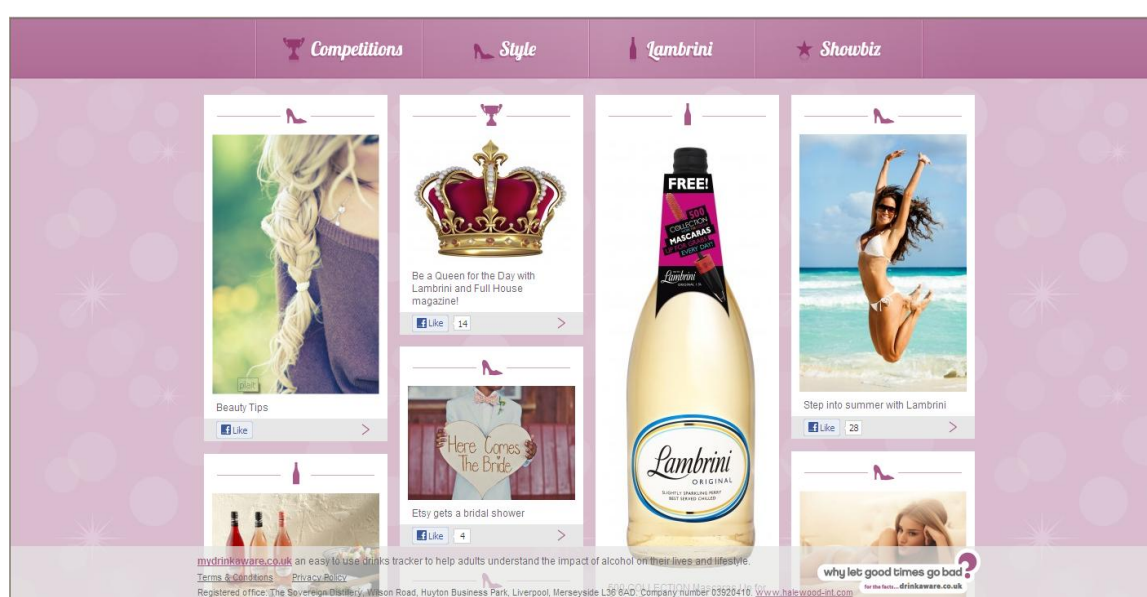


Figure 6: Lambrini website

Why let good times go bad?
for the facts...drinkaware.co.uk

As O'Malley and Valverde (2004:27) suggest, the ways in which pleasure is represented and linked to alcohol and freedom (by the drinks industry) still correspond with government's official discourses emphasizing how certain forms of drinking practices should be reflected. In other words, pleasure is only a warrantable motive for alcohol use when it is attached to the idea of moderation. Thus, choosing to drink excessively will effectively exclude individuals from being considered autonomous, choosing, free selves within this discursive system (e.g., Rose 1992).

¹ Drinkaware: 'independent' UK-wide charity (supported by voluntary donations from across the drinks industry)

Furthermore, with regard to alcohol drinking, the government (and media) 'ideal', of a rational, calculating neoliberal self, is closely related to the performance of a particular form of femininity. Both government campaigns and media discussions of 'risk' construct a particular (gendered) idea of the responsible drinker, and one that encourages women to engage in multiple 'safe-keeping' acts which have come to be a performative condition of normative femininity (Campbell 2005). These 'advisory' narratives compel women to be responsible drinkers, to wear 'respectable, appropriately feminine' clothing (Stanko 1997), and to have strategies in place whereby they are in control of their environment and actions. Women who are consciously aware of the risks involved in going out in the night-time economy and act responsibly under these conditions, are perceived to be taking 'appropriate' care of themselves. And governmental-led policy invokes a Foucauldian sense of 'caring for the self' in that women are encouraged to problematize being identified as a 'binge' drinker. The advice government offers also implicitly supports the widely held view that women are partially to blame for being raped if they wear 'sexy' clothing² and/or are intoxicated (ICM 2005). Foucault's theorisation is that once individuals have gained an ability to problematize their identity, they can engage in ethical work and practices of freedom, and develop practices of transformation ('safe-keeping') (Markula and Pringle 2006). However, whilst Foucault (1988b:11) was interested in the way in which the subject constitutes himself (sic) in an active fashion, by the ethical practices of the self, 'these practices are nevertheless not something that the individual invents by himself. They are patterns that he finds in his culture and which are proposed, suggested and imposed on him by his culture, his society and his social group'. Therefore, it would seem that, for women 'choosing' to participate in the UK's culture of intoxication, where 'drinking to get drunk' is the culture norm, their identity as appropriately and respectably feminine is in doubt. Women may be perceived as the 'doubly deviant figure of drunkenness in a dress' (Measham and Østergaard 2009:417), but she is actively fashioning her identity from those around her within this culture. On the one hand, both practices of drinking and dressing up are constituted as liberating, yet on the other they are tied into a culturally historical context that situates them as unrespectable and unfeminine.

2.3.4 Technologies of the self

For Foucault, power does not exist separately from the body, operating as an oppressive restraint; rather it is an ever-present and complex force which operates directly on and

² See Ringrose and Renold (2012) re 'rape culture'

through bodies, and this means thinking about the 'self' and 'identity' as always embodied (Pini 2004:160). As Pini (2004) explains, traditionally the self has been seen as some kind of inner 'essence' which exists 'inside' the body, whereas Foucault (and others) challenge this idea arguing that the physical body is a 'surface' upon which our selves are socially constructed. In other words, our 'selves' do not emerge naturally, but are produced within a wider historical and social context, in which our bodies are classified, managed, disciplined and regulated by others, and also by ourselves' (Pini 2004). Foucault was opposed to the idea of binary conceptualizations of power, and he warned against conceiving 'a world of discourse divided between accepted discourse and excluded discourse, or between the dominant discourse and the dominated one' (Foucault 1976/1998:100). Rather, he suggests, we should imagine a world as a multiplicity of discursive elements that can come into play in various strategies, thus any given individual (and any particular society) can contain multiple, shifting and often self-contradictory identities. And power, no longer held by sovereign authorities, and regulated by external agencies (e.g., the government), operates through individuals being encouraged to regulate and control themselves in line with limited social norms (Rose 1999a). Bodies can 'resist' regulation, by 'speaking out' against what is deemed acceptable or appropriate, however, from a Foucauldian perspective there is no completely unregulated space, no space which is ever free from the workings of power. As Pini explains, in exercising resistance to their regulation, through creating and establishing their own oppositional practices and discourses, individuals become bound up by their own power/knowledge systems; hence oppositional discourses will have their own disciplinary practices.

For Foucault, this regulatory power is a process of self-monitoring and self-surveillance, and he formulated the concept of 'technologies of the self' to get at the many ways in which we create and 'work upon' our bodies so as to become a 'self'. These technologies are always related to our specific historical and social location, and in negotiating a sense of self, we are guided by the operations of what Rose (1999a) calls the 'psy complex' – the forms of academic, therapeutic, institutional expertise that make up modern psychology and determine the ways in which identity can be defined.

Pini (2004:164) suggests that within the conditions of economic hardship facing most young people in the UK today, the physical body has become one of the main places where control can be exerted. At a time when young people can 'manage' little else, the body provides an important site for management and a 'primary vehicle' for achieving pleasure. As she points out, the use of alcohol and the 'cultivation of a particular fashion for oneself can...be seen as

attempts to explore the pleasuring and management of one's self' (Pini 2004:165)³. And in today's 'culture of intoxication' the recent construction of a 'hyper-sexual' feminine appearance can be seen as a 'look' that resists or subverts traditional conventions of femininity; young women, in creating this identity, can be seen as having a sense of control over the meanings of their own bodies (McRobbie 1994).

And whilst this hyper-sexualised 'look' might be seen in feminist terms as retrogressive, it is arguably an alternative image of femininity; a form of femininity which, Gill (2007a) argues, is a bodily property, and one which 'poses in attire traditionally associated with passivity and availability', yet redefines this 'look' in terms of sexual assertiveness and active desire (Gill 2007a; McRobbie 2009; Pini 2004).

In terms of 'going out' and (excessively) drinking in the night-time economy, young women are being encouraged to construct identities in terms that are aligned with consumer culture; as Griffin (2005) explains, young women wishing to socialise must, it would seem, drink alcohol, yet alcohol drinking is a markedly classed and gendered activity. Thus, in this context, young women regulate and manage their own bodies, whilst experiencing them as sites of both pleasure and resistance. And while they may produce the 'selves' expected of them within this social context, at the same time, they may produce a 'self' that challenges certain expectations. However, in creating, in a sense, resistant femininities, they also struggle with the disciplinary practices that, in turn, become part of this resistance. As Willett (2008a, 2008b) argues, consumerism itself can be seen as a 'technology of the self' and 'what you wear tells a lot about you', but individuals are far from being free to 'express themselves', since the forms of that expression are in fact being regulated in ever more subtle ways.

Foucault's shift in ontology has been criticised for its over-emphasis on agency (Fox 1997; McNay 1992), with the latter arguing that Foucault's stress on practices of the self, as primarily an aesthetics of existence – a "self 'stylisation'", does not sufficiently distinguish between practices that are 'suggested' to the individual and practices that are 'imposed' [through cultural sanctions and taboos] (McNay 1992:74). However, as Saukko (2008:61) explains, Foucault's emphasis on a more active self-construction is not 'predicated on a notion of freedom from discourses'. Rather, as Foucault (1988b:11) himself states, 'these practices [of self] are...not something the individual invents by himself. They are patterns that he finds in his culture, his society and his social group'. And in the UK, the development

³ This echoes some of the resistance through ritual theorising of subcultural theorists in the 1970s/80s (see introduction in *'After Subculture'* (Bennett and Kahn-Harris 2004) re: Centre for Contemporary Cultural Studies, Birmingham (CCCS))

of 'a hypersexuality within the 'new' 21st century night-time economy (NTE) environment' (Measham and Østergaard 2009:425) has, I suggest, led to an overwhelming obligation for young women to look 'hot' and as though they are 'up for it' (Gill 2003), even if they feel they are not.

The production of femininity, glamour, and/or sexual desirability, actively produces a body that represents significant (and hard won) capital investment (Lovell 2000:342), and whilst these investments may generate power and pleasure, something Hakim (2010) refers to as 'erotic capital', often women experience themselves as having little choice over whether to invest in themselves or not. As Skeggs (1997) explains, in her study of a group of young white working-class young women, it is situation-specific power, and this is particularly apparent in the classed and gendered context of 'going out' socialising in the NTE. For example, what is 'right' in the context of a working-class 'night out' will not be right if the class setting is altered, and these powers, resulting from disciplines of the body, may empower young women to act within the NTE, but they also serve to keep some young women 'in their place'.

In particular, being working class becomes an issue:

'She used to be conspicuous, as she clacked along the pavements in her white plastic stilettos, her bare legs mottled patriotic red, white and blue with cold, and her big bottom barely covered by her denim miniskirt. Essex girls usually come in twos, both behind pushchairs with large infants in them.....The Essex girl is tough, loud, vulgar and unashamed. Her hair is badly dyed not because she can't afford a hairdresser, but because she wants it to look brassy. Nobody makes her wear her ankle chain; she likes the message it sends...she is not ashamed to admit what she puts behind her ears to make her more attractive is her ankles. She is anarchy on stilts; when she and her mates descend upon Southend for a rave, even the bouncers grow pale' (Greer 2001)

Above - the '*Essex girl*', in *The Guardian* newspaper - is a clear example of the demarcation of class difference through practices of consumption, but this is not a new phenomenon, since depictions of the white working class in Britain have always pivoted on appearance [and notably on a perceived excess of (bodily) materiality] (Tyler 2008:22). Nonetheless, in today's society, a re-emergence of the vilification of young white working-class women can be understood in relation to the emergence of a new set of norms about femininity that reproduce clean, white, middle-class, feminine respectability.

Tyler (2006, 2008) suggests, in her analysis of the 'chav' figure, that whilst the naming of social class has to some extent been repressed over the past 30 years, this situation has now changed. She argues that the emergence of the figure of the 'chav' is part of a resurgence of the *explicit* naming of social class within contemporary Britain media (Tyler 2008). And the word 'chav' has become a term of 'intense class-based abhorrence' (Hayward and Yar 2006:16), which, in the case of the 'chav mum', marks a deliberate 'outpouring of sexist class disgust' (Tyler 2008:26). The chav mum is typified as a sexually excessive, single mum: 'an immoral, filthy, ignorant, white, excessive, fat, vulgar and disgusting working-class whore' (Tyler 2008:26-28). And Skeggs (2005a) extends this analogy to include the role hen-parties have in the shaping of national moral public culture in Britain. As she states, all the moral obsessions once associated with the working-class is now contained in one body: the hen-partying woman, whose body is beyond governance. Through her analysis, Skeggs (2005a:966) found that 'hens' were variously framed by associations of 'contagion, pollution, danger, distaste and excess'. And hens parties are constituted as the epitome of drunken excess, and thus a significant threat to the state of the nation as well as themselves (Skeggs 2005a).

The emphasis on excessive consumption generates the way in which sexuality is read on different bodies. As Skeggs (2005a:969) points out, while young white middle-class women become 'sites for the display of overt and excessive heterosexuality, white working-class women remain sexual objects; cleaved by respectability'; she illuminates this point using the central characters in *Sex and the City* as her example; women characterised as offsetting sexual pathology through professionalism, 'they are unlikely to be read as 'Essex girls', as Manolo Blahnik⁴ shoes replace white plastic stilettos'(Skeggs 2005a:970).

Furthermore, available constructions of a female sexuality are linked to signs of class and race (Attwood 2006). For example, Cowie and Lees (1981:20) suggest that 'any girl (except perhaps middle-class girls who may have some protection by their class position) is *always available* to the designation slag in any number of ways', and with appearance crucial, this requires not wearing too much make-up and 'sexual clothes'. As Attwood (2007) notes, the term 'slut', or its equivalents (e.g., 'slag'), is often used by women *against* women, and despite its ambiguous use, sliding between friendly joking and label, it illustrates 'a very narrow tightrope' young women walk to achieve the impossible state of being sexually attractive 'without the taint of sexuality' (Cowie and Lees 1981:20). Attwood (2007:238-9) points out that the term 'slut' carries a particular class significance; 'it is the lowly, dirty,

⁴ Manolo Blahnik makes designer shoes, which he says 'help transform a woman'
<http://www.manoloblahnik.com/>

sleazy quality of the slut that marks her out, a quality that suggests that overt sexuality in women is precisely not 'classy'. And 'classiness' is represented in the 'figure of the [today's] glamorous, white "sex goddess" as one facet of a broader post-feminist middle-class ideal in which femininities and sexualities are understood as "style"' (Attwood 2006:85). This shows how aesthetic value and class work in opening up and closing down access to particular groups of young women (as sexual subjects and consumers). 'Reputations for "easiness"...spread very quickly' (Willis 1977:44), thus, for some women, being 'up for it' must be a visual construction of 'to-be-looked-at-ness' only.

And the contradiction and complexity that young women face in constructing a feminine drinking identity is all too clear in the narrative of one of Lyons and Willott's (2008:704) participants':

'I'm a bit of a snob, but when you see like a group of girls all tarty up in their crop tops and long pants and stuff...And they're all drunk, it's just like 'Aw'...it looks like a really bad look to me'.

Young female drinkers may be hedonistic and reflecting undesirable forms of femininity (as is the case in Lyons and Willott's study), but often these post-feminist discourses are overlaid onto persistent existing gendered dichotomies such as 'good girls' and 'bad girls' (Griffin 2007 [1982]), or virgins and whores (Jackson 2006), which represent a form of social control over their behaviour (Fox 1977). Young women's behaviour is always 'at risk' of being reframed within more negative discourses about female sexuality (Gill and Arthurs 2006), and one reason for this is that 'good' and 'nice', are key concepts in the construction of femininity, fundamentally constituted through respectability (Skeggs 1997).

Women's alcohol drinking practices also inform, restrict and contradict these value constructs with dichotomies such as 'nice' and 'slag', still being used in today's neoliberal society. For example, the sassy girl discourse of a 'new fun-loving, independent and assertive young woman' maybe, as Griffin (2005:11) puts it, a 'new' and up-to-date model (that is more progressive than pre-feminist images of 'nice' respectable girlhood'). However, this apparent postfeminist autonomy and freedom is undermined by 'the tightness of her crop top' and her drunkenness; an outwardly 'appearance' that not only reflects young women's increasing representation as an 'object' of consumption, but also a 'surface' for condemnation. This is apparent in the parlance today's tabloid newspapers have for presenting women drinkers as 'titivaters' (objects) for their [male] readership (consumption), yet at the same time denigrating them as the 'doubly deviant figure of drunkenness in a

dress' (Measham and Østergaard 2009:417). Thus, this effectively undermines young women's independence and freedom through what Walkerdine (2004) calls the intensification of (sexualised) female commodification; something McRobbie (2009:65) refers to as 'the hyper-femininity of the masquerade which would seemingly re-locate women back inside the terms of traditional gendered [and classed] hierarchies'.

Furthermore, as Lazar (2006) points out, consumer images of the idealised feminine form greatly contrast to young women's lived realities. And whilst women do make 'choices', McRobbie and Gill argue that they do not do so in conditions of their own making; rather, young women internalise these socially constructed ideals of beauty and try to make them their own because to ignore the 'rules' would not only be unforgiveable, but the fear of 'losing control' over their appearance as an object of desire far outweighs any suggestion of resistance. Added to this complication is the moral entrapment of young working-class women in discourses of self-responsibility and respectability; young working-class women are deemed by the middle-classes as 'lacking' in some way and these discourses position them as 'failures'. This is acutely marked by both the UK news media and governmental policies (on alcohol consumption) who often construct working-class young women, in their performance of 'hetero-hyper-sexy' femininity, as both disgusting and 'at risk' (e.g., Clisby 2009; Hubbard 2011; McDonnell and Walsh 2011; Tyler 2008) (see chapter three).

For working-class women, in going out in the NTE they feel 'they have to prove themselves through every object, every aesthetic display, and every appearance'. And 'they care about how they are seen in the eyes of the other' (Skeggs 1997:90) because their bodies, as embodied and experienced 'sites', as well as 'sights' (Frost 2005:73), are sites of doubt; sites where they are never sure if they are getting it right. The middle classes have far more alternatives to how they *can be*, as witnessed by Skeggs's young women, and 'successful' femininity is implicitly white and middle-class. And whereas middle-classness characterises the young, white, slim 'sexy' ideal appearance of femininity, young working-class women, undertaking the same disciplines of the body as middle-class women, are met with derision. For example, whilst the porn-star 'look' may be regarded as an example of 'individual expression' on a young middle-class woman, the same appearance, on a working class woman, is often held to be disgusting and signifies a 'deeper', pathological and repellent subjectivity (Lawler 2005; Tyler 2006). Similarly, in the NTE, young female excessive drinkers are often implicitly coded differently, not particularly because of how much they drink since 'intoxication' is the norm; rather, they are judged on their appearance, and 'class becomes internalised as an intimate form of subjectivity' (Skeggs 1997:90). The pleasure young working-class women get from 'dressing up' and participating in the 'culture of

intoxication' is 'always disrupted by their knowledge of a judgemental external other who positions them as surveillants of themselves' (Skeggs 1997:89). This arguably reiterates Foucault's idea of regulatory power which he formulated through his analogy of the panopticon, and his concept of 'technologies of the self'. The focus on femininity/sexuality together with a shift from 'an external, male judging gaze to a self-policing narcissistic gaze' (Gill 2007:258) can be understood as the 'postfeminist sensibility', which Gill explains as a representation of a modernisation of femininity and includes a new 'technology of sexiness' (Radner 1993, 1999) in which sexual knowledge and practice are central.

2.3.5 Technologies of femininity

Bartky (2003:107) states that 'normative femininity' is now centred on the woman's body; 'not its maternal duties or obligations, but its sexuality, more precisely, its presumed heterosexuality and its appearance'. And whilst she acknowledges that there is nothing new in women's preoccupation with their appearance, she points to visual media (e.g., television, film and advertisements) for effecting a new form of disciplinary power over the female body, with bodies constructed as 'texts' of femininity (Bordo 1989). Technologies of femininity are routine obligations women undertake to manage their 'natural' bodies, making them conform more closely to the culturally powerful images of what 'valuable' feminine bodies look like. And to have a body 'felt to be 'feminine' – a socially constructed body through the appropriate practices – is perhaps necessary to a woman's sense of self as a sexually desiring and desirable subject' (Bartky 2003:105). As Bartky (2003:107) suggests, young women are no longer required to be 'chaste' or 'modest'; rather, in today's postfeminist cultures, it is the display of a certain kind of sexual knowledge, sexual practice and sexual agency that has become normative – indeed, a 'technology of sexiness' has replaced 'innocence' or 'virtue' as the commodity that young women are required to offer in the heterosexual marketplace' (Gill 2007b:72).

Technologies of femininity, including the disciplined use of clothing, make-up, dieting, and, perhaps more extremely, cosmetic surgery, are portrayed, within the fashion and beauty complex, as necessary routine practices required by all women who want to count themselves as such (Jeffreys 2005; McRobbie 2009). At the same time these discourses, of fashion, consumption, sexuality and beauty, have been reworked and harnessed to post-feminist ideas of agentic female sexuality (Attwood 2005; Gill 2007). And whilst the image of the beautiful, sexy body has been contextualised as an expression of empowerment – 'a sign of the confident, feminine self' (Attwood 2005:399), others would argue that it has 'become increasingly difficult to function as a female subject without subjecting oneself to

those technologies of self that are constitutive of the spectacularly feminine' (McRobbie 2009:60).

For a number of feminists, to occupy a feminine subject position is to be both a subject and an object; and de Lauretis (1987:26) argues that to 'inhabit both kinds of spaces at once is to live the contradiction', whereas Gill (2008a:42) suggests that women are now 'presented as active, desiring sexual subjects who **choose** to present themselves in a seemingly objectified manner because it suits their (implicitly 'liberated') interests to do so'. Gill's idea of *sexual subjectification* rather than objectification is connected to Foucault's idea of 'technologies of self' in understanding women's (sexual) agency as 'a technology of discipline and regulation' (Gill 2008a). And there is considerable debate amongst feminists regarding this question of agency, particularly in the relation to the sexualisation of culture. For example, some would argue that contemporary consumer culture is a feminized culture (Adkins 2001), and, as 'privileged' consumers, women can pick and choose from a range of multiple subjectivities which promise them freedom, choice and opportunity. Yet, this privilege is deeply intertwined with the sexualisation of female consumers, and the supposed liberation of women, 'enabled by a neo-liberal rhetoric of agency, choice and self-determination', coming in the form of sexualised products (Evans, Riley, and Shankar 2010:115). Women use sexualised technologies to produce the signified meaning of liberation, assertiveness and power (Duits and van Zoonen 2006); an 'up for it' femininity which is, supposedly, no longer performed for the male gaze but reconfigured as a form of recreation for women and as a way of producing post-femininity (Attwood 2005:400). However, as a number of feminists have argued, these discourses of contemporary female active sexual subjectivity often exclude those who are not young, white, slim, middle-class, heterosexual 'or otherwise conforming to a narrow, globalized homogenizing conceptualization of female beauty' (Evans, Riley, and Shankar 2010:115) (for similar arguments also see Gill 2009a; McRobbie 2009; Orbach 2009).

Gill (2003) has argued that women are no longer objectified in media representations but are instead, in the context of a neoliberal 'pleasing themselves' discourse, being subjectified; women internalise socially constructed ideals of beauty or sexiness as though they are freely choosing to present themselves as an object. Gill (2011:66) also questions whether these internalisations are really felt by women as authentically theirs ("all the way down") or just felt as external impositions. For many young women, part of the process of self-objectification is internalising an external view of themselves, and, in contemporary society, young women are arguably their own biggest critics. Furthermore, this 'gaze' often spreads to include other women, not just for their approval, but also to evaluate their respective failings (Woodruffe-

Burton and Ireland 2012:203). Whilst women might control every detail of their appearance (McRobbie 2009), with the power of sexual attractiveness paramount, society's 'gaze' implies that any meanings and interpretations are determined by discursive texts outside women's control (Smith 1990:182). And this practice is problematic for what it renders invisible (Gill 2009d), which Goldman (1992) explains as a form of 'terror' which women experience in objectifying themselves:

'There is the mundane psychic terror associated with not receiving 'looks' of admiration – i.e., of not having others validate one's appearance.....A related source of anxiety involves fear about 'losing control' over body weight and appearance...And, there is the very real physical terror which may accompany actual presentation of self as an object of desire – the fear of rape and violence by misogynous males' (Goldman 1992:125)

Elaborating on Goldman's statement, Gill (2009d:105) explains how representations of the all important sexually desirable and desiring female subject, and her requirement to present herself as an object of desire, does not reveal the fear she may have about being 'scantly attired, late at night, in the midst of large numbers of men who are drinking heavily'. Issues of choice and constraint are central in debates about technologies of femininity with alcohol representing one such issue. Women have the right of bodily control, and it is possible to argue that young women's construction of an 'up for it' femininity, in conjunction with their 'going out' drinking in the NTE, is a disruption to the power of social norms. In other words, young women constructing a 'hyper-sexy' femininity, which presents the female body as a desirable object to-be-looked-at, may be seen as appropriating the forms of the dominant ideology, yet women may also be using this look to construct oppositional meanings. As Attwood (2011:205) points out, 'looking and being looked at no longer necessarily signify powerlessness', rather 'stylish sexiness' is now more likely to be associated with cultural capital, and the visibly displayed female body with admiration and success. Similarly, I would extend Attwood's observation of the emergence of neo-burlesque performance in sex and music subcultures to the NTE, as offers an alternative stance for women to play with the norms and ideals of sexy femininity. The 'tease' of the burlesque performance can be seen as a way in which young women play with their femininity and control the 'performance environment' (Willson 2008). As Willson (2008:173) suggests, why can't we be sexually attractive? What is wrong with wanting to appeal to the opposite sex? And why do young

women have to conform to a 'masculine' way of acting, dressing and behaving (exemplified in the figure of the ladette) in order to earn their right to a public life?⁵

Willson (2008:177) states that 'burlesque performers want to dress up, be 'feminine', be sexual, be sexy....they want to be appreciated and adored....and their desire to be desired...both disruptively and disobediently plays up to narrowly defined "ideals"', and, she suggests, this 'parodies "fuckability"...it is an act of derision as well as an act of self-pride'. Willson's statement adds to the current debate over the question of female agency, with some feminists arguing that the kind of agency promised by the display of the sexy body only 'appears' (on the surface) to offer an assertive and position subject position to women. Characterised by a 'postfeminist sensibility' which reduces women to their bodies, they are subjected to impossible standards of acceptability (ideals of sexualised self-representation); representations which women internalise and make their own ('agency') (Gill 2007b), yet at the same time, this 'new regime of self-perfectability' (McRobbie 2009:63) is likely to cause enormous anxiety and stimulate constant self-monitoring. On the other hand, other feminists suggest, we, as researchers, should not collapse analyses of women's engagements with bodily display into binary oppositions of power, e.g. 'women have absolute freedom, or none whatsoever' (Attwood 2011:206).

Foucault explains power as expressive, productive and, in coming from below, it is exercised, not possessed. And as I discussed earlier, Foucault was opposed to binary conceptualizations of power, yet the social discipline and ideological control that surrounds women's public visibility is often regulated by binary opposites. This can be seen in the 'concern' expressed in both the UK media and governmental-led policy on 'binge' drinking which consistently constructs the young female excessive drinker as deviant and emulating masculine drinking behaviour. This discursive construction, which originated in the mid 1990s with the depiction of the 'ladette', ignores the numerous and even contradictory discourses young women negotiate in constructing femininities in drinking cultures; negotiations that do not produce a simple dominating discourse or one feminine body.

In contemporary drinking contexts, women have been described as hedonistic girls, and for many, driven largely by interests in partying and fun, alcohol was central to their 'ladette' identity (Jackson and Tinkler 2007). Alternatively, McRobbie (2009:83-84) points to the 'phallic girl' as a technology of young womanhood; one who 'adopts the habits of masculinity including heavy drinking...emulating the assertive and hedonistic styles of sexuality associated with young men'. Certainly many young women talk of excessive

⁵ See also Ringrose and Renold's (2012) paper on 'Slutwalks'

alcohol drinking as a positive experience (Banister and Piacentini 2008; Sheehan and Ridge 2001), and a practice in which they feel a sense of empowerment. And other women suggest they would find it difficult to imagine realistic alternatives to alcohol consumption in a culture where the pursuit of drunkenness has been normalised. Whilst there is an expectation on young women (and young men) to drink excessively in the UK's 'culture of intoxication' (Measham and Brain 2005), there must also be recognition that this is still a male-dominated culture. And, I suggest, despite assertions that the double standard surrounding women's public drunkenness has been eroded (Plant and Plant 2006:44), there remains a requirement for young women to 'do' femininities that some feminists view as a 'new form of gender power': a means of masking women's rivalry with men (e.g., McRobbie 2009:67); yet, at the same time, pitched, under the terms of postfeminism, as a matter of personal choice with 'male approval sought only indirectly' (McRobbie 2009:68).

In the current 'culture of intoxication', it would seem that constructions of femininity centre around 'a particular embodiment of hyper-femininity, both in terms of looks ('pink', 'fluffy' and 'well made-up'), and often in terms of behaviour (as 'nice' and 'compliant')' (Allan 2009:150). And some argue that, as a form of hyper-sexiness, this construction of femininity requires conformity to a narrow range of idealised femininity and excludes any woman who is not young, slim, white, beautiful and heterosexual. It has also been argued that, presented with fashion and sexualised technologies, women are being offered (on the surface) opportunities to freely indulge themselves, yet these technologies covertly remind women that they fail to measure up to the current impossible ideals (Bartky 1990). This complexity is illustrated by Evans, Riley and Shankar's (2010:119) analysis of women's engagement in aspects of sexualised culture, such as pole-dancing classes; on the one hand their participation constitutes liberation, yet on the other, it is still tied into a culturally historical context that situates it as sexist and objectifying'. And this produces a sexual identity that is inherently contradictory; an argument that, I suggest, can equally be applied to women's participation in the UK's 'culture of intoxication' which, within the NTE environment, has become increasingly hyper-sexualised. I explore the possibilities for agentic sexualised performances next, using the idea of 'technologies of sexiness'.

2.3.6 Technologies of 'sexiness'

Radner (1999:15), the first to use the idea of a 'technology of sexiness', states that 'the task of the Single Girl is to embody heterosexuality through the disciplined use of makeup, clothing, exercise, and cosmetic surgery, linking femininity, consumer culture and

heterosexuality'. Radner's statement is based on the work of Brown (1962/2003) who suggested that if a woman is not a sex object, then she is in trouble; and if using cosmetics or clothing, or walking in a particular way makes herself the object of desire, then all the better (Scanlon 2009:109). Sex, it seems, is an important weapon to the single girl and 'the technology of sexiness has as its goal, paradoxically, the maintenance of the single girl's marriageability' (Radner 1999:15). Gill (2007b:72), and more recently Harvey and Gill (2011:56), go further in arguing that, in today's postfeminist cultures, young women must 'no longer embody virginity but are required to be skilled in a variety of sexual behaviours and practices, and the performance of confident sexual agency is central to this technology of the self'.

Harvey and Gill (2011) develop Radner's concept of a 'technology of sexiness' and Gill's (2003) idea of 'sexual subjectification', which draws on Foucault's later work to highlight the way in which power works in bringing into being the new, feisty, playful, desiring (heterosexual) subject. And, in bringing both these concepts together, Harvey and Gill propose a new form of femininity organised around 'sexual entrepreneurialism'; doing this, in part, to emphasise a blurring of consumer and media culture into subjectivity. In opening up a language in which subject-object, power-pleasure, discipline-agency, are no longer set in contrast as antithetical binary opposites, Harvey and Gill (2011:56) are able to show how, for women, taking up or choosing to inhabit this 'new' femininity involves agency and dedication (in the form of neoliberal incitement to constantly self-police and self-improve), as well as pleasure.

Evans, Riley and Shankar (2010:126) also use this 'technologies of sexiness' framework to highlight a 'more doubled reading of women's identities' (within the context of the sexualisation of culture). Proposing that this doubling occurs on three levels, they first suggest that whilst women may use technologies in producing a sexual subjectivity, these technologies are already 'out there' like 'pre-packaged sexual knowledge' which women can buy. Secondly, performances of feminine sexuality may appear different to traditional constructions femininity, in the sense that these 'new' femininities embody the assertive, active, sexually knowledgeable subject, and undermine dominant discourses of female sexuality (as passive, docile, innocent and virtuous). However, conversely, these 'new' constructions only become different because they 'draw on normative discourses in order to do so' (Evans, Riley, and Shankar 2010:126). The idea that reading performances of 'sexy' femininity as subversive (and pleasurable) is only made possible by repeating the very discourses it seeks to avoid, and this leads Evans et al. to their third level of doubling; a level which perhaps reiterates the findings of feminists such as Gill and Skeggs, that, in despite the proliferation of popular discourses on female sexuality, dominant discourses in the media

still work in objectifying women, and women's participation in enacting a 'hyper-sexy' femininity is still limited in terms of age, class, ethnicity, embodiment and sexuality.

Certainly the work of both Harvey and Gill (2011) and Evans, Riley and Shankar (2010) highlights the usefulness of developing Foucault's concept of technologies of the self to explore the relationship between the cultural (the increasingly sexualised culture of intoxication) and the subjective. As Evans et al. suggest, this allows feminists to 'avoid positioning other women as problematic (in terms of their choices) whilst also drawing attention to the regimes of power operating within neoliberal and postfeminist rhetoric' (2010:127).

I am using the term 'hetero-hyper-sexy' to describe young feminine representations and feminine performativity in contemporary (drinking) culture as a way of drawing attention to the limited way in which 'sexiness' is currently presented.

2.4 Summary

In this chapter I have explored some of the theories and concepts of contemporary femininity(ies) and summarised how I understand contemporary modes of femininity as part of a 'new' form of postfeminism. A postfeminism which can be seen as a coming together of a complex and contradictory set of understandings and practices that simultaneously draws on and refutes feminism; constructs femininity as a bodily practice through a shift from sexual objectification to sexual subjectification; and folds into neoliberal forms of governance through a focus on the body as always unruly, and requiring constant attention and improvement via consumerism.

Furthermore, whilst young women are trying to negotiate the contradictory and complex emergent codes of sexual freedom and hedonism associated with new femininities, continuing inequalities in relation to class, gender, race, ethnicity, age, sexuality and (dis)ability are perniciously read as a form of failing on the part of those who are not slim, white, middle-class, physically able, young, heterosexual, and educationally and economically successful; they are either at risk or 'risk-takers', powerless having made bad personal choices. Extending this concept of 'risk' to include young women who participate in the UK's night-time economy (NTE), of which the 'culture of intoxication' is part, and using Foucault's theorising of power, I conceptualise some female drinkers as women who 'know' they are obliged 'to drink alcohol if they wish to socialise' (Griffin 2005:11). For many young women, their participation also requires them to conform to particular ideals of femininity and

feminine behaviour in these public spaces. These young women use technologies of 'sexiness' to enact a 'hetero-hyper-sexy', yet classy form of femininity; a 'look' which seems to dominate the increasingly sexualised 'culture of intoxication' (Measham and Østergaard 2009). And whilst their participation in getting drunk might be encouraged, for some women, negotiating inequalities such as the class-valued constructions of lifestyle consumer choices can make them vulnerable.

As I demonstrate in the following chapter, young women's excessive alcohol consumption can be unsettling. Not just for the neoliberal project in their apparent 'refusal to inhabit the position of responsible, moderate and rational subjectivity' (Griffin et al. 2009a:470), but also because they are women. In the UK's 'culture of intoxication' women's behaviour is often simultaneously pathologized as a health issue if they drink too much, and their femininity pathologized as either transgressive, feckless or not feminine enough (Jackson and Tinkler 2007).

Chapter Three: The ‘new’ ‘culture of Intoxication’ in the UK’s night-time economy (NTE)

3.1 Introduction

In chapter two I discussed how important consumption is to young women in constituting, reproducing and negotiating feminine identities based on self-transformation and choice. And one aspect of this is alcohol consumption. In this chapter I highlight how our history with alcohol reflects a well-established British tendency towards drunkenness, yet women’s drinking has historically been problematised and still is today. Whilst public concerns about excessive alcohol consumption and the ‘related binge and brawl phenomenon’ are really nothing new (Measham and Brain 2005:263), a shift in cultural practices around the 1990s, directly related to changes in the UK’s night-time economy (Measham 1996, 2004a), led to the warning that excessive (‘binge’) drinking was in danger of becoming a ‘new sort of British disease’ (Blair 2004). And today ‘binge’ drinking is understood as a particularly socially salient issue, with dramatic and sensational images of ‘out of control’ use, particularly ‘out of control’ young women as and ‘sexually’ dressed young women who have become a national focus. I discuss the changes leading up to the current alcohol drinking situation in the UK, and how ‘liberalization’, intended to encourage a more European style of drinking, has actually led to the increases in women’s drinking in other countries. I then review UK government policy, the alcohol industry and media attention towards women who drink, and explore how academia/research has addressed the issues raised about women’s participation in the NTE/‘culture of intoxication’.

Historically, in 17th and 18th century Britain, alcohol was accorded a very high esteem and drunkenness was not considered a major problem, particularly for men. And whilst it was possible during this period for women to drink in public, generally women drinkers were considered ‘disorderly, immoral and dishonest’ (Capp 2007:103). So although women could drink, not unlike today, they were usually constructed as a problem.



Figure 7: Life in London (Cruikshank, 1821)

‘The woman drinker was a threat. She was a threat to society, to her family and to herself. She was a threat to her husband and children’ (Dillon 2003:215)

Evidence of women’s transgressions with alcohol was illustrated by an artisan William Hogarth, and one of his most famous illustrations, *Gin Lane* (figure 8), details men’s indulgence with alcohol. However, it has as its focus a drunken mother dropping her baby (possibly to its death). This illustration was designed and published as part of a campaign to support the Government’s Gin Act, 1751 to combat the unprecedented mass consumption of gin in the first half of the eighteenth century (Gordon 2003).



Figure 8: William Hogarth. *Gin Lane* (1751)

Skinner (2007:1) notes that this Gin Act represented the last of eight gin Acts passed during 1729 and 1751, all of which were used by legislators 'as a means to uphold a patriarchal social order by seeking to delineate acceptable sexuality, morality and motherhood and by limiting the economic opportunities accessible to London women'. Women's drinking has always been problematised and women's drinking, unlike men's, continues to be presented, in many ways, as problematic which is, indeed, the rationale for doing this research.

3.2 Contemporary 'binge' drinking in the UK today

Historians tell us there have been 'waves' of concern about women's drinking, with intoxication seemingly permissible for a man, but not for a woman; she had transgressed not only the law and social convention, but 'she specifically violated the norms of being a "good woman" – the norms of appropriate femininity (Broom and Stevens 1991:26). After various licensing acts in the 1960s, explicitly geared towards the licensing liberalisation (Nicholls 2009), and major changes between the 1960s and 1980s for women in terms of economic independence, women's drinking has become more 'visible' in society invoking today's latest wave of national focused 'concern'. The UK Government response to what has become the dominant way for understanding 'binge' drinking at the moment, was to adopt the public health model, which replaced the previous 'disease' model which located problems with alcohol within the individual and constructed alcoholism rather than 'binge' drinking as excessive drinking all the time and only occasionally not drinking. The public health model redefined alcohol 'misuse' as a social problem, rather than an individual one: a problem 'in the population as a whole', and at 'an individual level as a result of life-style and risk behaviour' (Berridge, Herring, and Thom 2009:599). Emphasising alcohol misuse as harmful to family, friends, communities and wider society, not just the drinker, the public health model associates harm with widening health inequalities and worsening problems such as crime, anti-social behaviour and poverty; and it also stressed the pattern of 'binge' drinking as an important factor. By adopting the public health model the UK government aimed to target alcohol-related harm without interfering with 'the pleasure enjoyed by millions of people who drink responsibly' (PMSU 2004:2); in other words, the government expected 'all citizens to exercise their individual freedoms in ways which respect the rights and interests of their fellow citizens and observed shared standards of responsible behaviour' (HC 2012, para 23), and people 'binge' drinking were certainly not doing that. Furthermore, in delivering this model as part of their alcohol harm minimisation strategy, the government relied on medical experts to define safe levels of alcohol consumption to establish drink as a

matter of personal health and responsibility; affecting individuals, but, more importantly, individuals as members of UK society as a whole.

3.2.1 Evidence of young women's participatory 'binge' drinking

In 2005 market analyst Datamonitor predicted that the amount of alcohol consumed by young women in the UK would significantly increase over the next five years with women accounting for 38% of all drinking by 2010 (Rebelo 2005). However, according to Measham and Østergaard (2009), the rise in young women's drinking peaked around the millennium; for example, women's average weekly consumption [aged 16 to 24 years] rose from 17% (7.3 units) in 1992 to 33% (14.1 units) in 2002. And the proportion of young women, in this age group, drinking more than 6 units 'on at least one day in the previous week'⁶ rose from 24% in 1998 to 28% in 2002 (Richards et al. 2004); yet latest statistics reveal that young women exceeding more than 6 units decreased to 24% in 2007 (Robinson and Lader 2007). Although it should also be noted that changes in the methodology of data conversion (alcohol volume to units), introduced in 2007, has resulted in 'some undercounting of the number of units for certain types of drinks' (Goddard 2007:1). Nonetheless, the General Lifestyle Survey (GLS), carried out annually in the UK, reports the figure for young women binge drinking [aged 16 to 24] as falling in 2010 to its lowest recorded level at 17% (Harker 2012).

Despite this decreasing trend in 'binge' drinking, there is evidence that women are more susceptible to the effects of alcohol (than men) (AlcoholConcern 2008a); and with a rise in the number of women suffering from liver disease and other alcohol-related illnesses (IAS 2008a), a number of researchers have pointed out that young women drinking heavily on a regular basis will be on track to develop these physical health complications in years to come (Plant 2008a; RCP 2011). Research also shows that violence or accidents fuelled by alcohol are responsible for around one third of accident and emergency (A&E) attendances in the UK (rising to up to 70% between 5am and midnight on weekend nights) (EMPHO 2010; Harker 2012), and of this figure around 28% more young women than young men have gone on to be admitted to hospital from A&E departments (Smith and Curran 2010).

Yet according to researchers young people in the UK have by far the most positive expectations of alcohol in Europe and are least likely to feel that it might cause them harm

⁶ the measure intended to indicate heavy drinking that would likely lead to intoxication and set at more than 6 units for women

(AlcoholConcern 2011; Hibell et al. 2009). And many young people are unclear about the meaning of the term 'binge drinking', often equating it with 'alcoholism', 'dependency' and 'addiction' and something you do on your own (Talbot and Crabbe 2008). Additionally many people do not identify themselves as binge drinkers, either because they associate it with 'underage drinking', or because they subjectively define their own drunkenness (intoxication-based definition), which is not based on the number of units they have consumed (IAS 2007). Binge drinking is therefore a contested and ambiguous term, and regardless of whether young women's drinking is still increasing or has now peaked, attempts to measure these changes is somewhat reduced by an inability to agree on what a binge is.

3.2.2 Defining 'binge' drinking: the confused concept

In the UK the term binge drinking is used in surveys such as the General Household Survey and the Health Survey for England, and is based on the Office for National Statistics (ONS) definition of 'heavy drinking' – men drinking more than eight units, or women drinking at least six units, on at least one day in the last week. 'Hazardous' drinking refers to 'drinking above recognised sensible levels, but not yet experiencing harm' (22-50 units per week for men, 15-35 for women) (Deacon et al. 2007). And whilst sensible drinking benchmarks were set in 1995 for daily (3-4 units for men, 2-3 units for women) rather than weekly consumption of alcohol, a potential problem with these daily limits is, for example, that even eight units of alcohol drunk slowly during a lengthy drinking session will not intoxicate all drinkers (Hammersley and Ditton 2005:494). At current strengths in the UK this amounts to approximately 4 standard glasses (175ml) of white wine (12% strength), 6 typical alcopops (5% strength) or 8 shots (25ml of sambuca, tequila etc.) for a woman (source: NHS website unit calculator). Furthermore, despite the ubiquitous use of the term 'binge drinking' in academic literature, surveys and by different government departments, definitions are confusing and do not tally (Berridge, Herring, and Thom 2009); for example, Bartlett and Grist (2011:4) distinguish between what they consider to be two distinct understandings of drinking patterns: '*excessive alcohol consumption*', based on the government's unit-based definition of binge drinking (the consumption of twice the daily benchmark which for women is 2-3 units), and *binge-drinking* defined as 'extreme, excessive drunkenness and related behaviour'. And whilst there might be widespread agreement, among researchers and policy makers, that binge drinking is an important issue, there is no universally agreed definition of binge drinking or a standard way of measuring its occurrence (Murgraff, Parrott, and Bennett 1999) (see table below).

Definition	Examples of usage	Example of results
>8/ >6 units on at least one occasion in past week (72g/54g of alcohol). 'Heavy drinking' measure used as a proxy for binge. Current 'official' definition.	Cabinet Office – National Alcohol Strategy (2004) ANARP* (Drummond <i>et al</i> , 2004); GHS; BMA web resource (2005); Williamson <i>et al</i> (2003) (GENESIS study)	GHS 2005: (≥16 years) Men 19 %; women 8%. Williamson <i>et al</i> (2003) (20-60 years) Men 15%; women 18%. In their 20s: men 33%; women 38%.
≥8/≥6 units on at least one occasion in past week (64g/48g alcohol)	Health Survey for England (HSE) Jefferis <i>et al</i> (2005), national cohort study. Scottish Health Survey (SHS) Welsh Health Survey (WHS)	HSE 2004 (≥16 years) men 23%; women 12%. Jefferis <i>et al</i> (2005), prevalence at 23 and 42 years: men 49% and 42%. Women 29% and 19%.
≥10/7 units i.e. more than half weekly limits in one session. (80g/56g of alcohol)	RCP (2001) Jefferis <i>et al</i> (2005) (national cohort study)	Jefferis <i>et al</i> (2005) prevalence at 23, 33, 42 years: men 37%, 28%, 31%. Women 18%, 13%, 14%.
≥11 units on one occasion (88g of alcohol)	Measham (1996)	15-16 years, boys 40 %; girls 24 % Measham (1996)
≥5 drinks in a row (gender specific version 5/4). For the US this is = 70g/54g of alcohol).	US campus studies e.g. Weschler <i>et al</i> Niami <i>et al</i> (2003b) ESPAD (European School Survey Project on Alcohol and Other Drugs) 1995, 1999, 2003.	Last 30 days men (≥18) 22.2%, women (≥18) 7.2 % (Naimi, 2003b) 15-16 years, binge drink ≥3 times in last 30 days UK boys 26%, UK girls 29% (ESPAD, 2003)
Pattern of drinking that brings BAC to .08g per cent or above (5/4 drinks in 2 hours)	National Institute on Alcohol Abuse and Alcoholism (NIAAA) 2004.	None found in published literature to date.

* Alcohol Needs Assessment Research Project

Table 1: Definitions of binge drinking using different 'cut-offs' (Berridge, Thom, and Herring 2007)

Furthermore, whilst some alcohol researchers use statistically based methods for defining 'binge' drinking (e.g., 5+ measure), others use terms such as *heavy sessional drinking* (Measham 1996), *heavy episodic binge drinking* (Wechsler and Nelson 2001), and *risky single occasion drinking* (Gmel *et al.* 2008). Yet, as it is adults who usually frame these definitions of binge drinking, these terms have very different meanings for young people (Wright 1999:79), who rarely see themselves as 'bingers' and define intoxication in terms of alcohol effects, not absolute quantities (Gill *et al.* 2007). Young people use terms such as 'getting pissed' (Lyons 2006:234), 'getting annihilated, wasted or mullered' (Griffin *et al.* 2009a:466), and against predominantly negative societal discourses they prefer to use positive language to describe their own drinking practices.

More recently, researchers have started using terms such as 'bounded hedonistic consumption' and 'rational hedonism' (Brain 2000), 'controlled loss of control' and 'determined drunkenness' (Measham 2004b), 'calculated hedonism' (Brain 2000; Szmigin *et*

al. 2008), 'heavy sessional consumption'⁷ (Measham 1996), and 'extreme drinking' (Martinic and Measham 2008), to describe how young people view drinking as part of their lives. Measham (1996:283) describes 'consuming alcohol for a "big bang", for maximum impact' (or consuming alcohol for a maximal intoxicating effect) as encompassing young peoples' sense-making of 'binge drinking'. Looking for alternative ways of describing a drinking pattern that has so many dimensions, Martinic and Measham (2008:8), for example, argue that, their term - *extreme drinking* - 'fits the bill', since it cannot be constrained by measures of quantity, frequency, or intoxication; it draws heavily on cultural definitions; and the motivation driving it is key. Ethnographic studies and in-depth interview research have detailed young people's desire to achieve this altered state; and 'drinking to get drunk' is considered by a wide social spectrum of young adults as acceptable and expected, and revolving around 'going out' on Friday and Saturday nights (Hubbard 2011).

Despite the problems in defining 'binge' drinking, it is agreed that there is an issue and it is understood as drinking too much, whatever that means. Understanding 'binge' drinking through the public health model has certain implications for policy; particularly since it constructs this pattern of drinking as a social problem, yet young people view it as a socially acceptable behaviour in the UK, and many Northern European countries such as Ireland, Belgium, Denmark and the Netherlands (Measham and Østergaard 2009; POST 2005). Nonetheless, UK government discourse portrays 'binge' drinking as a British 'disease' (Blair 2004) and distinctively 'characteristic of the British drinking culture' (POST 2005).

3.3 What is this 'disease'?

Whilst much of the recent academic work on alcohol consumption sees the current drinking culture as a new phenomenon, the British media suggests that 21st century 'binge' drinkers are a repackaging of 20th century 'lager louts' (Measham and Brain 2005); or 'lager loutettes' as the Home Secretary, David Blunkett, referred to women binge drinkers in 2004 (Hickley 2004). And 'binge' drinking is now perceived as involving 'large number of [British] young women supposedly 'believing' it quite acceptable to drink heavily and become conspicuously and often loudly drunk' (Plant and Plant 2006:44); a view that find particular support in countries where drunkenness, especially among women, is seen as socially unacceptable (e.g., Southern Europe). Nonetheless, whilst Plant and Plant's 2006 analyses showed that young women in other parts of Europe (and the world) were not emulating British women's

⁷ Defined as consuming between 11-40 units of alcohol in one session (one occasion)

excessive drinking, since then countries such as France, Spain, Australia and New Zealand have been experiencing a change.



Figure 9: 'How French women caught the British drinking disease' (Pollard 2010)

Excessive alcohol consumption is now represented as an apparent 'British disease' that is 'spread' by women to other parts of the world; for example, the above caricature of an intoxicated woman has the by line 'French women 'caught' the disease' as though they had no active choice in the matter. Britain stands accused of 'exporting' British binge drinking to such countries as France, in which young women see 'the excesses of their counterparts as glamorous and exciting, and something to emulate' (Allen 2011). And France sees *'le binge drinking'* as a growing problem (Willsher 2011), with evidence pointing to a significant rise in the numbers of 'binge' drinking women (aged 18 to 25 years) from 30% to 42% between 2005 and 2010 (Beck et al. 2011). Academic (and journalist) on Anglo-French affairs, Nabila Ramdani, is cited as saying that binge drinking is associated with 'irreverent, coarse societies....values are becoming less relevant, especially within the "look-at-me" culture of reality TV and celebrity magazines' (Allen 2011; Witton and O'Reilly 2011). These significant value judgements in talk around young people's excessive drinking, particularly amongst older people, and the fact that young people are choosing to participate in this culture, creates a tension which I explore as particularly relevance to my thesis.

Some would argue, that a lack of rigorous policy and academic work into drinking in Europe and the UK, together with the labelling of 'binge drinking' as a British disease has led to 'anecdotal stereotyping' (Jayne, Valentine, and Holloway 2008:88); particularly since the idea that British young people, especially working-class young women, are drunk and 'out of control' seems to dominate political and popular discourse, and constructed as particular 'classed' and gendered visions of 'ways of behaving' (Skeggs 1997). And these

constructions not only contrast with middle-class, cosmopolitan, civilised European drinking practices (Jayne, Valentine, and Holloway 2008:83), but also reverberate earlier century representations of working-class women drinkers as immoral and unrespectable in the UK. With 'binge' drinking constructed as a 'British' export, the intensification of which British people enjoy, part of the government's approach for reducing alcohol (mis)use was to introduce the Licensing Act 2003 and 24 hour licensing; theorising that more flexible opening hours would end Britain's 'binge culture', and transform the saturated 'monocultural' night-time economy (NTE) into a multifaceted 'continental-style 'café culture' (HO 2010). However, this theorisation provoked political debate, even scepticism, amongst Labour's cabinet ministers; the Labour party chairman, Hazel Blears, argued that British people were incapable of adopting a more civilised, European way of drinking in suggesting 'maybe it's our Anglo-Saxon mentality...we actually enjoy getting drunk' (SundayTimes 2006). And whilst the British are not unique in enjoying getting drunk, countries importing our drinking culture, such as Australia, Canada, New Zealand and the USA', are, apparently, 'handling it better' (Plant and Plant 2006:24). I argue that in constructing 'binge drinking' as a British 'disease' spread by women, enables the UK government and worldwide media to use 'blame' discourses in representing women as the problem for its 'contagion'.

Since the 2000s the UK government, in trying to minimise dangerous drinking, has steered a careful course between twin policy objectives – protecting public health by trying to encourage a more European way of drinking as we have seen, but also trying to solve inner-city 'problems of widespread unemployment, physical and social decay, crime, homelessness and dereliction' (Hollands and Chatterton 2002:292). And in order to understand the cultural shift towards 'binge' drinking in the UK's 'new culture of intoxication' (Measham and Brain 2005), it is important to examine it 'in relation to changes in national government, local authority and beverage alcohol industry policy' (Measham 2004a:310).

3.4 Binge Britain: the new 'culture of intoxication'

Historically, public concerns about excessive alcohol consumption are nothing new. However, as Measham and Brain (2005) point out, significant attitudinal and behavioural changes in relation to alcohol consumption since the early 1990s arguably makes it a 'new' phenomenon. They propose four developments which together suggest a new 'culture of intoxication', of which 'binge' drinking is a product and one which involves the 'person in context':

1. Illicit consumption: the 'decade of dance; and the use of illicit drugs
2. The recommodification of alcohol and the 'big bang'⁸ in sessional consumption
3. Determined drunkenness
4. 'Binge' drinking, economic deregulation and social regulation: the process of seduction and repression

Measham and Brain (2005:267) argue that that the timing and antecedents of 'binge' drinking, lie in the emergence of the British acid house and rave scene and a shift from alcohol to illicit 'dance' drugs such as amphetamine, nitrites and ecstasy (Forsyth 1997), which created a 'platform of acceptability' (Shapiro 1999:33) to further experimentation, and a willingness to experience altered states of intoxication as a part of leisure 'time out'. Additionally the immediate, instant gratification that could be gained from drugs such as ecstasy was preferred to a long night drinking in a pub:

"Young people seem less prepared to sip beer for hours, culturally they like short sharp fixes...Youngsters can get Ecstasy for £10 or £12 and get a much better buzz than they can from alcohol...it is a major threat to alcohol led business" (Collin and Godfrey 1997:271-72)

With the rave market estimated to be worth £1.8 billion (Thornton 1995:15), the alcohol industry responded (Brain 2000; Measham 2004c); *recommodifying* alcohol beverages as a psychoactive product which would appeal to young adults by developing high strength bottled beers, ice lagers, white ciders and 'alcopops' in the mid 1990s; followed by high strength bottled spirit mixers (ready to drink - RTDs) in the late 1990s; shots or "shooters" in the early 2000s; and new products designed to appeal to underage and female drinkers.

Furthermore, the alcohol industry re-designed licensed leisure venues with the development of specific 'urban nightscapes' (Chatterton and Hollands 2003) for young adults' varied nightlife activities and as a means of regenerating local economies and post-industrial wastelands. The 'night-time economy' (NTE), a phrase often used to refer to the night-time economic activity, has played a key role in the entertainment and retail provisions of cities at night, designed primarily to cater for 18-35 year old consumer groups (Measham and Brain 2005); and which some might define further as the 'booze economy' (Shaw 2010:894). Additionally it was proposed that a greater mix of uses in town centres, particularly in the

⁸ 'big bang' approach to sessional drinking is 'to get drunk; to get as big a buzz from alcohol as cheaply as possible – the maximum bangs per buck' (Measham 1996:297)

evenings, would attract a diverse range of 'new' class of high-income pleasure-seekers favoured as the 'shapers of what Chatterton and Hollands (2002) called these new '*urban playscapes*'. This included the idea that providing a '24-hour city' of entertainment (Bianchini 1995; Heath 1997) would attract previously underrepresented groups, such as women and gay culture; and this would be the way to re-generate inner cities and encourage a European-style café culture model whilst offsetting economy decline. Manchester is cited as the most visible of these 'new' cities; as part of Manchester county council's plan to actively reinvent Manchester as a progressive and cosmopolitan European city included assigning minority groups their own 'market niche and spatial enclave' (Hobbs et al. 2003:81), and Canal Street, a traditional city-centre street, epitomised the new 'visibility' of Manchester's gay leisure market (Skeggs 1999:218), containing a high density of bars, and becoming known as the centre of Manchester's Gay Village. Within this newly 'visible' leisure space, 'gay' identities have become aestheticized and commodified in ways which appeal to fashionable heterosexuals (Skeggs 1999); and she argues that the Village has had a particular allure for straight working-class women since it offers a 'trendy, aesthetically pleasing, modernist...space' which provides 'legitimation of their cultural capital, alongside the potential for fun and greater safety' (Skeggs 1999:224). The Village became the 'flagship' for Manchester's NTE with a socially mixed clientele; including gay men, lesbians, drag queens, students, straight drinkers and hen and stag party goers (Measham and Brain 2005). And the 'culture of intoxication' encompassed this broad spectrum of young people, and encouraged their pursuit of *determined drunkenness* through the commodification of hedonism.

3.4.1 Commodifying hedonism

Facilitated by the introduction of the Licensing Act 2003 and 24 hour licensing, night-time entertainment zones are now a vital ingredients in the appeal of town centres, and 2008 statistics showed the NTE as producing a £66 billion contribution to UK plc., employing nearly 1.3 million people (NMI 2010). And as these night-time entertainment zones rely on the commodification of hedonism (Hobbs et al. 2000) in promoting consumer excess and intoxication (Measham and Brain 2005:275), current concerns about 'binge' drinking must be moderated by a consideration of this rigorous commercial development, and the official sanctioning of young adult drinking by changes in licensing policy (e.g., Szmigin et al. 2008 - seduction and repression).

The government, police and alcohol researchers have linked developments in the alcohol industry, and more than a decade of *sessional consumption* of alcohol, 'to a broader attitude change in terms of the culturally acceptable and desirable state of intoxication for drinkers' (Measham and Brain 2005:268). And researchers report an apparently deliberate and *determined drunkenness* by young people regardless of gender or age (Measham 2006; Szmigin et al. 2008); for example, Measham draws attention to certain individual and social constraints surrounding young women's drinking in public, which had featured in her earlier study in the mid-1990s yet were noticeably absent from the interviews she carried out in 2004. Nonetheless, young people's drinking is not totally out of control; consumption is 'designed to allow consumers to 'let go' and experience the pleasures of indulgence without attendant risks, in a hedonistic yet bounded drinking style' (Measham and Brain 2005:274); and most drinkers do 'manage their intoxication in terms of 'desired and actual states' without attracting the attention of criminal justice or health service professionals (Measham and Brain 2005:274). Therefore, in order to understand the emergence of this new culture of intoxication, Measham and Brain suggest that we cannot simply link it to alcohol industry developments; rather, we must also take into account how 'we' now live in consumer societies. Not only do young women [and young men] form their identities through consumption 'but the psychology of consumption is centred on the search for gratification, integration and identity formation', thus increased *sessional* drinking is a reflection of this hedonistic leisure culture fuelled by the economic deregulation of licensed leisure on which the night-time economy relies (Measham and Brain 2005:276). And a number of feminists put forward similar arguments in highlighting links between a kind of 'It's about me' (Lazar 2009) hedonistic individualism, based on gratification and pleasure, and the neoliberal economic principle (Gill and Arthurs 2006; Tasker and Negra 2007).

As a number of social theorists suggest, contemporary societies are consumer societies (Bauman 1999; Rose 1991) and consumption has replaced production as a marker of identity (Griffin et al. 2009b; Nava et al. 1997). Marketing campaigns sell goods and services to produce an identity in a lifestyle, and 'consuming oneself into being' (Ringrose and Walkerdine 2008:230) is of central importance in a life, characterised by neoliberal governance, in which subjects are reconfigured as 'individual entrepreneurial actors across all dimensions of their lives' (Brown 2005:57). Thus, for example, it could be argued that one of the purposes of licensed leisure is the possibility of consumption and achieving an identity produced through consumption.

However, Wearing and Wearing (1991:4) argue that the 'commodification of leisure' (e.g., the growth of entertainment and licensed premises in the night-time economy) creates a

sense of identity loss and this can be similarly linked to the point I made in chapter two regarding the impact neoliberalism has on young women trying to produce an ideal self. Similarly, Hayward (2004:13) argues that we live in a society now where everything is subject to change and reconstitution; even 'previously stable and seemingly inexorable social components' (e.g., gender, sexuality and the individual subject etc), are now rendered mutable'. However, as Hayward goes on to point out, 'such a set of social circumstances may in the long term, 'offer society a whole new range of opportunities and possibilities, in the short term, they also throw up understandable feelings of melancholia and uncertainty' (Hayward 2004:13). It is, he argues, this backdrop of social anxiety coupled with a culture of control, which makes alleviating stress and pursuing pleasure inherent in capitalist consumer society. Thus, 'in the face of an over-controlled, yet at the same time highly unstable world' (Hayward 2004:17), excessive alcohol drinking can be seen as an exciting way of experiencing what Measham terms 'controlled loss of control' (2004b). And this, Measham (2004a:321) writes, is how 'consumption-based leisure (which pushes the boundaries in the pursuit of pleasure) can be considered as both problem and solution in contemporary society'. However, I would also argue that the expectation on individuals to get drunk not only produces a 'need' or compulsion to drink in a culture where intoxication is normalised, but, for some individuals, it means the pleasure they thought they would get from drinking is, in effect, 'endlessly displaced and postponed' (Ringrose and Walkerdine 2008:230).

Nonetheless, as Hayward and Hobbs (2007:438) point out, the rapid re-development of inner cities, the creation of night-time entertainment precincts and substantial increase in the number of pubs, clubs and restaurants in many post-industrial cities has encouraged individuals to 'play with the parameters of excitement and excess'. And Measham and Brain (2005) propose that modern consumers are calculating hedonists who, within a 'culture of consumerism and hedonism which prioritizes and commodifies pleasure, pursue 'particular altered or heightened states of physical pleasure through pharmacological and behavioural means' (Measham 2004a:319). Measham and Brain (2005) argue that this pursuit of pleasure in the new 'culture of intoxication', is calculated, within the boundaries of time (the weekend), space (club, bar), company (supportive friends) and intensity. Yet perhaps more potently, it is also bounded by the powerful (and new) form of self governance (Rose 1991); representative of a neoliberal social order which emphasises individual responsibility and accountability (Steinberg and Johnson 2004). Thus, paradoxically, in the culture of intoxication, consumers failing to fully regulate the consequences of their (alcohol) consumption 'offend the (neoliberal) rules of self-policing consumer behaviour' (Measham and Brain 2005:277), and this has become the neoliberal mantra of government and social policy in addressing the UK's alcohol 'problem'.

Whilst government campaigns to tackle 'binge' drinking, often take a 'rational choice' perspective in asking consumers to reflect on the benefits and costs of their alcohol consumption, 'binge drinkers only realise they have reached the point of declining marginal utility after they have passed it' (Hayward 2007:238). In other words, they already know the benefits of intoxication – instant gratification – and the possible risks involved in drinking too much do not become apparent until afterwards. As De Haan and Vos (2003:45) explain, the whole premise behind getting drunk is to deliberately defy 'the normal injunction to think and act rationally', unless 'one actually believes that people systematically and rationally set themselves the task of projectile vomiting in the street, falling asleep in doorways, or verbally abusing perfect strangers!' (Hayward 2007:238).

Thus UK government policy relies on the politics of neoliberalism for producing 'rational' drinking subjects who are responsible for themselves. This means that if young people drink sensibly and 'appropriately', the government does not need to intervene or repress consumer behaviour. However, young people are also encouraged to get irrationally drunk in a culture where intoxication is expected and normalised as 'commodified contentment' (Osborne and Rose 1999:757). And while individuals are supposed to be entrepreneurial actors who take care of themselves, getting drunk is seen as a failure to 'self-care' (Brown 2005:42), and is further complicated by the suggestion that getting drunk is also a way for young people to 'let go' and temporarily forget about being responsible.

Furthermore, developments in the NTE have tapped in to young women's increasing participation in the 'culture of intoxication' by introducing the possibilities for a number of new nightlife concepts including an influx of 'female-friendly' bars, and re-branding and marketing drinks specifically for women. And this has led to the suggestion that the NTE has been feminised (Hollands and Chatterton 2003; Measham and Moore 2009; Rebelo 2005).

3.4.2 Branding, marketing and feminizing alcohol – consumer-orientated sexiness

Young women have become important consumers of urban nightlife; their use of public spaces, of 'stepping outside alternative nightlife provision', means they are often perceived as challenging the traditional images of women and expectant male behaviours within mainstream nightlife (Chatterton and Hollands 2003:153). And with the rapid expansion in technology and media outlets, alcoholic drinks advertisers increasingly consult market researchers to maximise their target audience – young women. According to TGI data, women who are regular consumers of alcohol are also the most likely to augment a

particular beverage brand's message, and women who have the highest levels of alcohol consumption not only consume the most brands but they are also the biggest conveyors of branding messages (Budden 2008); thus, influencing the influencers is important. There is also a noticeable increase in portrayals of sexuality in alcohol advertising; advertisers' use of partially dressed or even nude women has been a technique which objectifies women, but as Gill (2009d:100) suggests, women are now presented as active, desiring sexual subjects who 'choose to present themselves in a seemingly objectified manner because it suits their liberated interests to do so'. As Amy-Chinn (2006) points out, this postfeminist emphasis, on women pleasing themselves, is double-edged, since advertising has become a key site for a hyper-sexual culture. We are witnessing 'a hyper-culture of commercial sexuality' (McRobbie 2004a:259) in which women are portrayed as proactively seeking sexual objectification and at the same time 'endorsing the ironic normalisation of pornography' (Amy-Chinn 2006:173). As I discussed in chapter two, Amy-Chinn demonstrates this in the title her paper about lingerie advertising - 'This is just for Me(n)'; connecting 'me' and 'men' in suggesting there is no difference between what 'I' (women) want and what men might want of 'me'.

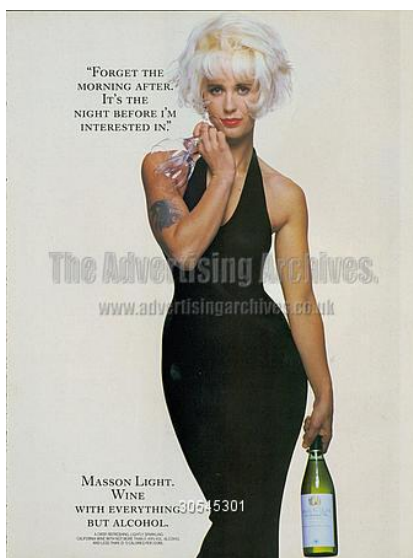


Figure 10: 1980s Paula Yates/Masson wine (The Advertising Archives)



Figure 11: 2000 Skyy Vodka (Advertolog)

The above examples of alcohol advertisements were placed in UK magazines and on UK television during the 1980s and 2000s, and their focus on the female body is apparent. The caption accompanying the advertisement in figure 10 is also suggestively provocative, highlighting a change in the way advertisers' have started to perceive young women; female sexuality, although 'still severely proscribed by femininity', was now being articulated in

terms of being 'active, recreational....consumerist and consumed' (Evans 1993:41). As Attwood (2006:86) puts it, 'sex is stylish, a source of physical pleasure, a means of creating identity, a form of body work, self-expression, a quest for individual fulfilment', and sex sells.

However, whilst there have been shifts in the way gender is now represented in advertising, with advertisers developing, for example, 'commodity feminism' partially to appease women's hostility to being constructed as passive objects for the male gaze (Goldman 1992), it is, like postfeminism (as I discussed in chapter two) more complicated. And Gill (2007:90-91) argues that advertisers now fetishize and commodify female sexuality with contemporary femininity being constructed as a '*bodily characteristic*'. Citing Goffman's work on non-verbal signals in coding gender representation in advertisements, Gill explains how 'women are typically shown lower (or smaller) than men using gestures which 'ritualised their subordination' (Goffman 1979:43). And the postfeminist contradiction can be seen in figure 11 in which the *young* woman is hyper-sexualised (sexy body, voluptuous breasts) and supposedly pleasing herself, yet at the same time she is presented 'lying down' (Gill 2009d:96) underneath a man. And I would agree with Gill (2007:94) that concluding feminism has reached a rapprochement with advertising is premature since advertisements are not that straightforward.

Nonetheless, market researchers have suggested that alcohol has been feminised, and this "feminisation" has had the single biggest impact on the 'on-trade' (pubs, bars and other establishments where alcohol is consumed on the premises), with the introduction of drinks and venues designed and promoted to appeal to women (Rebelo 2005). 'Feminisation' as a process, has been applied by a number of theorists in relation to alcohol, starting with Wilkinson's (1994) suggestion that young women had been quietly leading a 'genderquake' revolution, resulting in a feminisation of nightlife culture (Lindsay 2005; Measham and Moore 2009). And Day, Gough and McFadden (2004) used the term 'feminisation of drinking' to address the popular media's portrayal of alcohol as a pleasurable leisure activity for women. Together these alcohol industry driven incentives have succeeded in increasing women's visibility and spending power in public spaces demarcated for drinking which were previously dominated by men (Measham and Brain 2005; Plant and Plant 2006). As Jernigan (director of the Center on Alcohol Marketing and Youth at John Hopkin's University) comments:

'In the past 25 years, there has been tremendous pressure on females to keep up with the guys...now, the industry's right there to help them... they've got their very own beverages, tailored to women. They've got their own individualized, feminized drinking culture' (Johnston 2011)

These changes, towards a supposedly feminised ‘culture of intoxication’, have also facilitated and contributed to the growing complexity and diversity in representations of femininity and practices seen as appropriate for women (Rúdólfssdóttir and Morgan 2009). For example, following on from Shaw’s (1994:9) suggestion that women use participation in certain male-dominated leisure activities to resist social constraints and stereotypes, the increasing visibility of women’s alcohol use is perceived by some feminists as a sign that women now have more access to the pleasures traditionally afforded to men (Baumgardner and Richards 2000; Heywood and Drake 1997; Walter 1998), with Baumgardner and Richards (2004:59) equating intoxication with emancipation.

The Government has strict guidelines for advertising alcohol which explicitly state that ‘marketing communications should not: encourage excessive drinking...imply that alcohol can enhance confidence....imply that drinking alcohol is a key component of success.... must neither link alcohol with seduction, sexual activity or sexual success nor imply that alcohol can enhance attractiveness...or imply that alcohol takes priority in life or drinking alcohol can overcome boredom’ (CAP 2010: section 18: 82-86). Yet Lambrini’s advertising strategies include themes such as sexual attractiveness, alcohol as a major contributor to social success (e.g., ‘social lubricant’), and ‘*getting pissed is a big part of life*’ (see appendix I for examples). They used the slogan ‘Lambrini girls just wanna have fun!’,⁹ in most of their campaigns between 1999 and 2005, implying that consumption of alcohol, albeit Lambrini, was an integral aspect of young women’s social identity. And certainly in terms of marketing alcohol, the sexualisation of women’s bodies persists in today’s alcohol advertisements; Skyy Spirits advertisement (figure 12) was criticised for showing a woman in red tights and heels, (supposedly) having sex with a large Skyy blue vodka bottle, and arguably violating advertising ethics on the grounds of its implicit association with sexual lewdness (Livingston 2010). However, in an attempt to redeem themselves, Skyy Spirits used the tactic of becoming promoters for the film ‘Sex and the City 2’, and appealing to women with the by-line: “*every girl’s ultimate fashion accessory – couture-style cocktails*” (Skyyspirits.com 2010); a familiar message that accompanies many ‘must-have’ products ‘increasingly designed to address women as sexual consumers’ (Attwood 2005:393).

And in drawing on chapter two, in which I discussed how postfeminism has created new sexual subject positions, we can see how these positions are tied into alcohol as advertisers manipulate the alcohol market, aimed at women, by honing in on consumerist areas that epitomise the “sexy, hip, smart and sassy” (Arthurs 2003:317); ‘sassy’ is something Griffin

⁹ Filed and published as a UK trademark on 20 August 2008 no. 2495719

(2005:11) describes as: 'fun-loving, independent and assertive', and it is a way of portraying women as 'knowing sexual ob/subjects'.



Figure 12: 2010 Skyy Vodka's 'Skyy Sexy' Campaign



Figure 13: 2010 Skyy Vodka Sex and the City Campaign

Lambrini (figure 14) provides a clear example of 'this current fashion for women's sexual consumerism in conjunction with playful retro imagery' (Attwood 2005:394). Targeting 18-24 year old female consumers, Lambrini uses the strap line "*girls just wanna have fun*" alongside an implicit reference to the 'Rabbit' (note the capital R), as a way of addressing young women as confident and assertive 'knowing' sexual subjects. As Attwood (2005:396) points out, the vibrator (e.g., 'Rampant Rabbit'®) has 'become one of the most visible contemporary signs of active female sexuality...and increasingly signifies as a fashion accessory', therefore what better way to sell an alcoholic beverage designed specifically for female consumption.

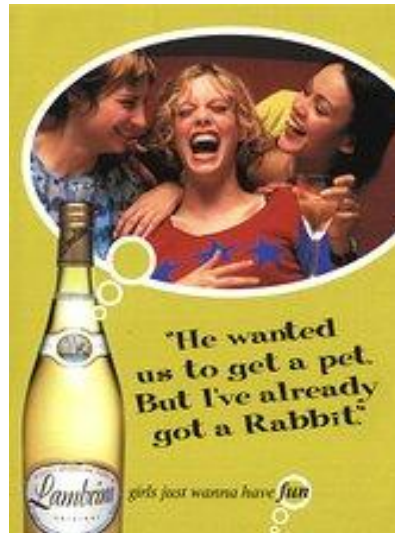


Figure 14: Lambrini UK Magazine Advert, 2004

Advertisers, aware of women's greater spending power and social assertiveness, have specifically targeted them using both aesthetic and textual persuasion. Foster (2001) examined several Archers commercials, which she says promote the idea of 'being a woman'; the commercials both feature beautiful women in 'control of their lives and of their boyfriend', and thus by drinking Archers this empowerment is enabled. Further examples are Diageo's 'Nuvo', a pink sparkling liqueur packaged in an 'elegant bottle whose design was inspired by luxury perfume brands' and believed to 'appeal to women who seek sophistication in their alcoholic beverages' (EUCAM 2008:6). And Barcardi's 'Island Breeze', which, according to the brand's spokeswoman Kim Cattrall ('Samantha' in 'Sex and the City') appeals to women as it only has '½ the calories, none of the guilt' (figure 15). This message underpins Gill's idea of a postfeminist sensibility with its focus on individualism, choice and empowerment, but also emphasising monitoring and self-discipline. Accompanied by an image of Kim Cattrall as sophisticated and ultra-feminine, this advertisement potentially takes advantage of young women's insecurities and anxieties about their body image, under the guise of offering them a solution (Kilbourne 2003). In other words, women can now 'have it all' if they drink 'Island Breeze':

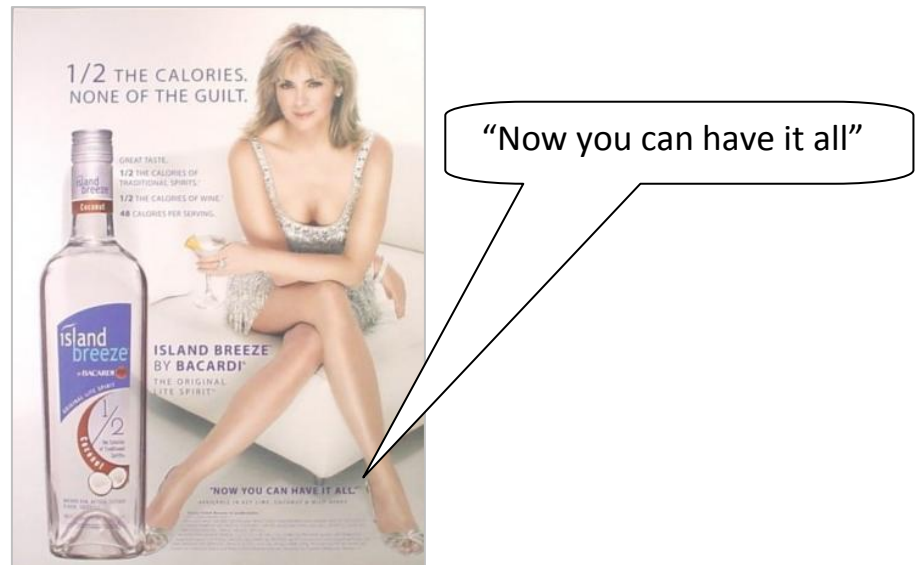


Figure 15: 'Island Breeze' magazine advertisement, 2005

Similarly, one company producing a range of wines labelled “*Girls’ Night Out*”, has website links to ‘Facebook’, inviting women to join a ‘*a club that you can only become part of as a woman*’¹⁰. In portraying certain alcoholic beverages as ‘exclusive’ to women it suggests the product is special in some way and like the ‘Rabbit’ is a necessary and fashionable female accessory. Furthermore, this is another example of how alcohol advertisers are taking advantage of the growing popularity in social networking; particularly ‘Facebook’, which currently has 845million active users of which 57% are women, and those aged 18-25 years are the largest demographic group of users (Infographics 2012). In 2011 Diageo plc, a global drinks company, struck a multimillion-dollar advertising partnership with Facebook as ‘an innovative way of setting themselves apart from their competitors’ (Bradshaw 2011). Mart, Mergendoller and Simon (2009), in examining the ways in which alcohol is promoted on ‘Facebook’, found a number of paid alcohol advertisements (that are subject to certain guidelines and age restriction), but also thousands of ‘pages’, ‘applications’, ‘events’, and ‘groups’, which were not only ‘de-facto free advertising’ but also ‘key parts of a viral marketing plan’ with little or no access restrictions in place. Below are a few examples of the numerous alcohol-related pages especially designed to attract a female audience:

¹⁰ <http://www.girlsnightoutwines.com/>



Figure 16: Advertisement for Belvedere Vodka, with photograph taken at Paris Fashion week, March 2012



Figure 17: 'Page' for Girly-drinks.com



Figure 18: 'Group' - "I Don't Get Drunk, I Get Elegantly Wasted!"

These three examples of advertising provide their female audience with: cocktail recipes (figure 17); advice on how to define their drunkenness, i.e. to say you “*get elegantly wasted sounds more classy*” (figure 18); and links to prestige events such as Paris Fashion Week to promote their brands (figure 16). The ‘Facebook’ pages use evocative words such as ‘fashion’, ‘elegant’, ‘classy’ and ‘girly’, which, it could be argued, imply that alcohol drinking is a necessary accomplishment in successfully constructing oneself as respectably and sexily feminine (and wards off respectability/unfeminine concerns).

The media’s use of images depicting young women in a variety of poses and attire, together with the alcohol-related content in ‘Facebook’ pages, have, in a way, created an ideology of excitement and female empowerment which significantly benefits the alcohol industry;

particularly since government advertising codes now strictly forbid links to drinking that promote 'daring, unruly or irresponsible behaviour', 'boosts confidence', or 'encourage immoderate drinking' (BCAP 2003). Kilbourne (1999) suggests that advertisements 'tell' women that alcohol can make them successful, sophisticated and sexy and without it, life is dull, ordinary and boring; thus, she adds, alcohol use is often 'glorified' and alcohol problems are seldom seen. On the other hand, contemporary media research (Wood and Skeggs 2004, 2008) focuses on how branding, advertisements and marketing draws the audience into a 'relationship' rather than using explicit 'selling' (see also Skeggs, Wood, and Thumim 2009).

In the next section, I take a closer look at the ways in which the UK media, Government policy, and academia, implicitly and explicitly addressed women who drink (excessively), and I 'unpack' the themes of neoliberalism and postfeminism as significant in terms of feminine representations and subjectivities.

There has been a series of responses to the ‘culture of intoxication’ from the media, government and academia in the UK, and in particular how they represent women’s participation, and I review each of these in detail.

There is little doubt that 'going out to get drunk' has become part of a 'good night out' for many young people in the UK, with 'public drunkenness now socially accepted, if not expected' (PMSU 2004:23); and over the past decade the media has 'sensationalised' or 'glorified' the behaviour of young drinkers, especially young women, in what has become known as 'Binge Britain' :



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example, an appropriate picture accompanies most articles which showed the very images being complained about. Described as 'almost biopolar' (Mazzarella and Pecora 2007), newspapers' visual images of young women (particularly their bodies) are 'celebrated' and used to attract adult readers, yet the accompanying stories demonise these same women as being responsible for the UK's 'culture of intoxication'. It would seem that women are not newsworthy unless they are sexualised, and as 'news' this is portrayed in two ways. Either the story being told is that 'women can be successful, but must also be 'sexy' and heterosexual...otherwise they are not depicted at all or are belittled, ridiculed' (Wykes and Gunter 2005:96), or they are portrayed as 'out of control'. The media has control over what its audience sees, and although I am not assuming that readers will simply absorb messages passively and unthinkingly, the media does construct alcohol consumption as a masculine/unfeminine activity, underlined by masculinist terminology (e.g., "ladette").

Day, Gough and McFadden (2004) suggest that women are positioned outside of drinking culture; a point also argued by Griffin (2005) in her suggestion that there is no available or desirable way of 'doing' femininity and drinking alcohol. Women, in occupying spaces in drinking culture, are often met with "backlash" discourse (McRobbie 2009), which may serve as 'both an attack on women – putting women back in their place – and, simultaneously as a reassurance for men' (Gill 2003) who, threatened by women's increasing popularity and visibility, wish to preserve or reclaim alcohol consumption and drinking spaces as male or masculine (Day, Gough, and McFadden 2004; Lyons, Dalton, and Hoy 2006; Willott and Griffin 1997).

Nonetheless, more often than not media's focus on 'binge' drinking hones in on young women, rather than young men. Reasons for this may include the simple, yet to some disconcerting, fact that whilst young women are now far more 'visible' in public, it is their drinking and their attire that draws critical attention. As McRobbie (2009:60) suggests, women's increasing visibility is suggestive of a post-feminist equality, within which 'sexual agency' has become a form of regulation and one that requires the re-moulding of feminine subjectivity to fit the current postfeminist, neoliberal moment (Gill 2008a:35). However, in the media's eyes, these women are doubly deviant for being drunk **and** in a dress.

Young women's participation in the 'culture of intoxication' is often perceived as adopting the habits of masculinity; for example, young women who drink heavily, have casual sex and get into fights figure as so-called 'lad(ettes)' (Jackson and Tinkler 2007; McRobbie 2005). McRobbie also refers to this figure as the 'phallic girl': a young woman who 'performs masculinity', including having a similar sexual appetite to her male counterparts, but without

relinquishing the femininity which makes them so desirable to men (McRobbie 2009:84). McRobbie suggests that consumer culture and various media sources (i.e., magazines, TV, UK tabloid press) encourage young women to emulate masculine hedonistic behaviours; yet at the same time these same sources, particularly newspapers, ‘provide new dimensions of moral panic, titillation and voyeuristic excitement as news spectacle and entertainment’ (McRobbie 2009:84). Certainly newspaper articles often use the word ‘ladette’ as synonymous to a female ‘binge drinker’ (see figure 20), equating young women’s drinking as either imitating, or being the same as, men’s drinking behaviour, with commentary such as ‘girls are binge-drinking and emulating male behaviour’ (Eccles 2010). Thus, portrayed as immoral ‘lad-ettes’, it would seem that the media obsession with women who drink excessively represents not a medical panic, but a moral one (Dutchman-Smith 2004).

My brief web search of UK tabloid newspapers writing about ‘binge drinking’ revealed how they use particular discourses to constitute female drinkers, such as ‘shame’ (e.g., figure 22), and its variations (e.g., ‘shameful’; ‘shamelessness’; ‘streets of no shame’), and frequently use words such as ‘disgusting’, ‘respect’, ‘dignity’ and ‘modesty’. These articles are invariably accompanied by particular photographs of women publicly drinking, honing in on their appearance as a form of titillation for their readers (figures 21, 22 and 23) and drawing attention with captions such as ‘barely there outfits’, ‘skimpy outfits’, and ‘half naked women’ (see appendix J for examples).



Figure 20: Daily Mail, August 2010



Figure 21: Daily Mail, October 2009



Figure 22: Daily Express, January 2008



SPECIAL REPORT: Why do intelligent young women who are nurses, teachers and mothers drink themselves to oblivion every night across Britain?

By LAURA POWELL
Created 7:29 PM on 28th October 2011



Figure 23: Daily Mail, October 2011

Despite statistical analysis which indicates that binge-drinking is more of a problem among men (AlcoholConcern 2008b; Hughes et al. 2008), 'media and public attention continues to focus on the increase in women's drinking' (AlcoholConcern 2008b:1). And there is a constant recurrence of 'shame' discourses, and Measham's (2002) suggestion, that a revival of the body as a site of study, is reflected in the media's use of the female body to describe women drinkers in terms of what they are wearing:

"In a night of shame...young girls, barely wearing any clothes... behaving as though life is one big 18-30s holiday on the Costa" (Smith 2011)

Furthermore, I suggest the UK media use headlines such as 'Binge Britain's night of shame', together with graphic photographs of young women, as a way of tacitly denigrating young working-class women drinkers. Despite Government aspirations towards a classless society, divisions between the lower/working, middle and the upper classes persists in the 'popular mind' (O'Reilly 2000). And this is particularly prevalent in media reporting on 'binge drinking', as one reporter comments:

“These mainly comprise drunken young women in miniskirts, staggering along provincial high streets, with a bottle in their handbags, and their knickers hanging off one ankle, or rolling about in gutters, covered in Malibu vomit.....it seems that the people behind these proposals [government proposals to curb excessive national drinking] have bought into the media myth of our national drinking problem mainly comprising sexy, dishevelled, young things lying pissed in gutters in Nottingham on a Saturday night.....it would make a nice change, if, just for once, the set of photos illustrating an "excessive alcohol" article could be a couple in matching Boden jumpers, sitting with their third large glass of burgundy, watching a Cranford repeat” (Ellen 2009).

The quote above is an example of how the media explicitly classes women drinkers by their ‘bodies, using text which mobilises class via ‘lifestyle’ markers. For example, in the article Ellen (2009) talks of *drunken young women* on a Saturday night in *Nottingham*; Nottingham has a predominantly white, working-class population (IPSOS 2008), and in the early 2000s it also became a national flashpoint over binge-drinking (McGregor 2012). Ellen also implicitly compares the young women’s drunkenness in public (on the streets) with drinking alcohol at home (*watching a repeat* on television). This invokes an outside/inside dichotomy in which there is the suggestion that alcohol consumption is an activity that ‘properly’ occurs indoors, where it is out-of-sight, whereas outdoors it is constructed as transgressive and morally offensive (Dixon, Levine, and McAuley 2006). Furthermore, Ellen draws the readers’ attention to attire, as markers, such as *miniskirts* and *knickers hanging off* which are bodily revealing and often coded as working-class ‘excess sexuality’ (Skeggs 2004) compared with ‘*Boden*’ jumpers whose wearers are, according to Turner (2003), invariably constructed as middle-class. Ellen also talks of a *bottle* of *Malibu*, a popular alcoholic beverage with young women, but one often perceived as ‘girly, young and downmarket’ (Nancarrow, Nancarrow, and Page 2002:319). This Ellen implicitly compares with a *glass of burgundy* (wine), which is not only recognisable as an icon of western consumerism and affluence (Overton and Murray 2012) but also drinking wine is a marker of upward class mobility, hence the title of Overton and Murray’s (2012) paper: “Class in a Glass”.

Discursively constructing working-class young women drinkers as shameless, disgusting or unrespectable, these newspapers present the female body in this context as one beyond governance and one ‘that signals class through moral euphemism’ since the tabloid press rarely name it directly, but ‘rely on the process of interpretation to do the work of association’ (Skeggs 2005a:965). As Skeggs suggests, femininity has never been easily accessible to

working-class women since they have ‘historically been coded as the sexual and deviant other against which femininity [is] defined’ (Skeggs 2001:297).

Lawler (2004) talks of identities being *conferred* on subjects in such a way that they are marked as normal or abnormal, as right or wrong. And defining femininity as a ‘bodily property’ (Gill 2007a), the female body is presented in the tabloids to be scrutinised and evaluated by women (and men) and is always at risk of ‘failing’. The risk of ‘failure’ is heightened through tabloid newspapers’ implicit references to women’s femininity are a means of articulating classed distinctions, and working-class women are vilified through their ‘bodily appearance (assumed to mark a deeper, pathologized, psychology); their ignorance or lack of understanding; and their inadequacy as mothers’ (Lawler 2004:115). The latter has become another staple of tabloid reporting, for example drawing attention to ‘health warnings’ and the effects of alcohol consumption upon female fertility and unborn children, and linking ‘risky sex’ with excessive drinking as a cocktail for pregnancies and infections (Borland 2011). These media texts, often accompanied by an image of an attractive young woman either pregnant or holding a baby, ‘class’ such women as victims or villains. For example, an article from the *Daily Mail* (30 June 2010) portrays pregnant women who drink as wholly ‘responsible’ for potentially damaging their unborn ‘sons’ fertility¹¹; firstly this article puts emphasis on male fertility and secondly there is no mention of the effects of fathers’ who drink on the unborn child. A further example, from the *Daily Mail* (23 February, 2012), reads of a ‘respectable, middle-class, mother-of-five’ and her ‘secret shame as a binge-drinking mother’; describing the woman as respectable, middle-class and ashamed of her excessive drinking, the article immediately directs the reader towards seeing her as a ‘victim’, and this can be contrasted with the construction of the working-class female drinker as ‘shameless’ and ‘out of control’ – benchmarks which define ‘respectability’.

In the next section I discuss how the UK government has responded not only to the ‘culture of intoxication’, but also to the media’s analysis and reproduction of this culture, making it a moral panic effectively.

3.5.2 Government’s approach to young women’s excessive drinking

Before I outline current Government policies on alcohol, I feel it is necessary to provide an insight into the circumstances that gave rise to such strategies. Evidence points to a considerable fluctuation in alcohol consumption (per head of population) over the past 100

¹¹ <http://www.dailymail.co.uk/health/article-1290542/Drinking-alcohol-pregnancy-damages-sperm-quality-sons.html>

years, with per capita consumption doubling between 1945 and 1979 (see appendix K for details). And whilst alcohol drinking is an unremarkable part of many families' lives (Valentine, Jayne, and Gould 2010), it has become significant in the normalisation of public drinking cultures. Furthermore, although Customs and Excise figures suggest that alcohol consumption stabilised in the 1990s, national surveys such as the General Household Survey (GHS), indicate that drinking among certain groups, notably women, continued to rise (AlcoholConcern 2003). Whilst UK Governments were relatively inactive on alcohol intervention strategies until 1992, a concern for the population's general wellbeing and health resulted in the publication of a white paper – '*The Health of the Nation – A Strategy for England*' (DoH 1992), and the introduction of 'safer (sensible) drinking limits defined as a weekly alcohol consumption of no more than 21 units for men and 14 units for women. These guidelines changed in 1995, with the publication of *Sensible Drinking* (DoH 1995), to incorporate benchmarks for daily rather than weekly consumption, since the weekly measure 'missed' single session heavy drinking sessions. The inter-departmental group behind the 1995 *Sensible Drinking* review included 'both medically and scientifically qualified members and generalists with relevant experience' (DoH 1995:2). And under section eight of the document, entitled Women and Alcohol, the 'group' acknowledged Moira Plant's (a leading authority in the alcohol field) oral evidence that in spite of increasing scientific work on women's drinking since 1985 there was still less scientific literature from which to make conclusions about women as compared to men. A lack of evidence made it impossible to produce an authoritative statement regarding women and alcohol, but endorsed the view that 'women should be advised to drink at lower levels than men, and to take this into account when making their individual choices' (DoH 1995:19).

Concern with the rising levels of alcohol consumption in the late 1990s, particularly among young women, led to pressure on the Government to act. In April 2000 the Government published a White paper on reforming alcohol and entertainment licensing (Time for Reform: Proposals for the modernisation of our licensing laws, no. CM4696). And Jack Straw, then Home Secretary, introduced the proposals by highlighting that the UK's current alcohol licensing system was an 'amalgam of 19th century legislation, intended to suppress drunkenness and disorder, and later additions'. Proposing the need for 'a radically new system which carefully balances rights and responsibilities' (DCMS 2001:5), the Government's objectives included the introduction of flexible opening hours to: minimise public disorder; reduce underage-drinking; and to encourage a more continental -style drinking culture. Despite criticism from a variety of sources including the Institute of Alcohol Studies, Alcohol Concern and a number of local authorities that the paper contained confusion and ambiguity, these proposals were passed in the form of the Licensing Act 2003

(implemented in November 2005). Initially, research findings reported that 'contrary to the picture often presented in certain parts of the mass-media, the impact of the Licensing Act appears to be neutral' (Foster et al. 2009:113). However, in 2005 evidence from a series of Alcohol Misuse Enforcement campaigns (AMECs) suggested that the Licensing Act was not enough:

'we need to achieve a fundamental change in attitude, so that binge drinking is not longer regarded as socially acceptable.....make the 'sensible drinking' message easier to understand...encouraging individuals to exercise choice' (HO 2005)

In 2004 the Government made their first attempt to tackle 'binge drinking', with the formulation of the *Alcohol Harm Reduction Strategy for England* (PMSU 2004), and discussing ways in which negative potential consequences, perhaps as a result of introducing the Licensing act, could be managed. In this publication binge drinking is identified as one of two patterns of drinking (chronic drinking being the other) particularly likely to increase the risk of harm:

'Binge-drinkers are those who drink to get drunk and are likely to be aged under 25. They are more likely to be men, although women's drinking has been rising fast over the last ten years. Binge drinkers are at increased risk of accidents....There can also be a greater risk of sexual assault. The impacts on society are visible in, for example, high levels of attendance at A&E related to alcohol.' (PMSU 2004:4)

Conceptualising binge drinkers as those who 'often drink with the specific objective of getting drunk' (PMSU 2004:10), the Government and the Department of Health have since introduced a number of updates and amendments (see appendix M) which work, in constituting the UK's 'problem' with alcohol, by mirroring neoliberal themes of self-regulation, responsibility, choice and control (Griffin et al. 2009b). Throughout New Labour's term of office, their alcohol policies have operated through a 'neo-liberal form of governmentality' (Lemke 2001); they have tried to reconstruct the boundaries of regulation and order and legitimate a form of 'government' control 'and mechanisms of self-governance' on alcohol drinking 'via the transfer of self-responsibility (neo-liberal governance)' (Skeggs 2005a:968). Alcohol policy places full responsibility for drinking 'sensibly' on the individual:

'it is vital that individuals can make informed and responsible decisions about their own levels of alcohol consumption' (Tony Blair, Prime Minister's Foreword, PMSU 2004)

However, the focus on 'sensible drinking', based on neoliberal ideas of rationality, self-control and moderation, 'collides with an emergent culture of intoxication...an economic climate of de-regulation of the alcohol market and a political context of licensing reform' (Measham 2006:265). Government policies imply that pleasure equates with a form of 'rational' and 'responsible' enjoyment (O'Malley and Valverde 2004:27); but 'pleasure' becomes problematic where its pursuit – as in the imagery of 'hedonism' (Measham 2004a) has become normalised in the night-time economy and inextricably linked to 'chemical intoxication', chiefly 'drunkenness' (Hobbs et al. 2000). Furthermore, the Government's interpretation of binge drinking as 'risky' and 'harmful' does not equate with the lived experiences of the supposed binge drinkers themselves; rather, 'bingeing' becomes something that *other* people do (Herring, Berridge, and Thom 2008). Evidence suggests that many young people perceive their own excessive alcohol consumption not as 'unconditional' and 'out of control' drinking, rather it is 'bounded consumption' (Measham and Brain 2005) or 'calculated (and planned, rational) hedonism' (Brain 2000:9); a functional process of personal management, together with a sense of personal control and self-actualization (Hayward 2004). Measham (2004b) points out that, for some young people, they can both indulge in what may appear as excessive alcohol consumption, but contain such behaviour by time, space and social situation. Young people are 'choosing' when, where and who to drink with; and even when they 'appear' to drinking excessively they are 'choosing' to do so. With the Government shifting the 'responsibility' to consume rationally and sensibly on to the consumer and alcohol marketers generating the idea of 'freedom of choice', young people are doing just that: playing an active role in their own self-government by adopting strategies to simultaneously minimise risk and maximise pleasure.

Nonetheless, the Government has persistently applied the idea of 'individual irresponsibility' to young people in their alcohol harm reduction policies and campaigns. Since 2004, strategies include the '*Know Your Limits*' campaign (HO 2006), which used television advertisements, posters and a website aimed at 18 to 24 year olds. When this campaign was initially launched Public Health minister Caroline Flint stated that it was 'not a morality campaign, but an effort to encourage common sense' (Ranzetta 2006). And in 2007 the Government published their *Safe. Sensible. Social. The next steps in the National Alcohol Strategy* (DoH/HO 2007) aimed at promoting a 'new' 'sensible drinking' culture. Both the

KYL campaign and the *Safe. Sensible. Social* publication illustrated the serious potential consequences of 'binge drinking' and reminded young people of the gendered 'unit' guidelines. However, young people viewed the campaign material promoting 'safe' levels of consumption as "laughably unrealistic" (Griffin et al. 2008:10), and the literature was criticised for overlooking the 'social' context in which young people's drinking takes place (Szmigin et al. 2008). And as Hackley et al. (2011:12) add, *Safe.Sensible.Social* also ignores how, as a process, drinking is also classed and gendered (Skeggs 2004).

The '*Know Your Limits*' campaign ran again in 2007 and 2008, and the latter was revised with a catchphrase 'Would You?' to 'challenge prevailing attitudes and change behaviour' and explicitly target men and women respectively to the possible consequences of binge drinking (HO 2008). Print advertisements were placed in men's and women's magazines such as *Nuts*, *Zoo*, *FHM*, and *Heat*, *Closer*, *Cosmopolitan* and *Glamour*, and together with TV and radio ads, the overall idea was to reflect an understanding that men and women have different likely patterns of alcohol consumption and would face different associated 'problems' (Haydock 2009b). These associated 'problems' included physical aggression for men, and, for women, the *Know Your Limits (KYL) Binge Drinking Campaign Resource Pack*¹² suggests 'the emphasis should be on vulnerability and shame' (p.4); and although class is not directly referred to in this emphasis, it is connoted 'through moral euphemism' (Skeggs 2005a:965) since young working-class women have been epitomised in the construction of the 'ladette' who is marked as unrespectable, irresponsible, immoderate, shameless and unfeminine. Placing the emphasis on vulnerability is one way of intimating to young women that they are 'failing'; their vulnerability to 'excess' (by modest(y) and middle-class standards) renders them not only working-class but also the 'constitutive limit' to decency (Skeggs 2001).

With this emphasis on 'vulnerability and shame', the *KYL* campaign also sets out to raise women's awareness about 'the use of alcohol as a tool in sexual assault'. Evidence does highlight potential dangers for women drinking excessively on 'nights out' (Engineer et al. 2003; Testa and Livingston 2009), however, there is also evidence that women implement their own practical harm minimization strategies on such occasions (Sheehan and Ridge 2001). Nonetheless, some of the *KYL* posters, illustrating the sexual risk of binge drinking to women, resulted in the Home Office being criticised for using rape against women as a fear tactic to prevent binge drinking:

¹² http://www.alcohollearningcentre.org.uk/_library/Resources/KYL/FINAL_KYL_pack.pdf



Figure 24: Part of the Alcohol Know Your Limits series



Figure 25: Derbyshire County Council poster (Willitts 2011)

Similarly, Brown and Gregg (2012) highlight how Australia's national binge-drinking strategy depicts responsibility for rape as the woman's for drinking too much, and an outcome that is hers alone to regret. One in three people still believe that a woman is 'partially responsible' for being raped if she is drunk (Finch and Munro 2007; Smee 2009), and situations in which women should apparently take the blame for being raped include: 'dressing provocatively', 'dancing in a sexy way', and 'acting flirtatiously' (OM 2010:9). Yet, as critics point out, alcohol doesn't rape women, rapists do (e.g., Pitcher 2009).

As Hutton (2004) points out, accounts of women's sexual behaviour in leisure-based activities (such as clubbing) tend to focus on women's risk avoidance behaviour, whereas there are alternative readings of women's experiences that involve 'risk and pleasure'. Whilst Hutton is talking about women's drug use, her suggestion, that it is not so much the effects of drug usage on the consequences of the behaviour of women themselves but the expectations held by others about their likely behaviour, can equally apply to alcohol consumption. Men often view women who drink (and/or take drugs) as 'fair game' to be coerced into unwanted sexual encounters (Hutton 2004:232), whereas women often see alcohol as 'fundamentally fun and pleasurable' (Sheehan and Ridge 2001:358); as part of a 'good night out with the girls', and as 'good, harmless fun' (Guise and Gill 2007). As Sheehan and Ridge (2001:361) found, young women are aware there are dangers (e.g., to reputation) but are able to 'harness the sexual assertiveness that accompanies intoxication and put it to good use'; in other words, women are able to be proactive and assertive about who they might want to have sex with (Hutton 2004). Additionally, belonging to a group and feeling connected to a group is important to women on 'nights out'; not only is it a way of

minimising harm (safety in numbers), but also the strong supportive network of girlfriends helps them deal with life's drama and challenges (Sheehan and Ridge 2001).

In my view, focusing on the differing effects of alcohol on men and women not only evokes a (new) form of discrimination, i.e. 'men can drink, women can't', but also encourages the pervasive sexual double standard in which men are rewarded and praised for having multiple sexual encounters whereas women are derogated, shamed and stigmatized for acting similarly. As Gill (2007:139) says, women's behaviour is pathologized, while the view of men as 'testosterone timebombs' just waiting to explode is treated as unproblematic. In drinking contexts, women's capacity for control and agency is depicted as forever at 'risk' and requiring constant practices of diligence.

Government 'binge-drinking' campaigns use discourse that calls on young women to regret their drunken actions; for example, the government's KYL's gendered television advertisement starts by asking "You wouldn't start a night like this, so why end it that way?" followed by a young woman in her bedroom preparing to go out. The 'actress' in the advert then rips her tights, smudges her make-up and arranges vomit in her hair (figure 26). The assumption of regret hinges on ideals of normative femininity and heterosexuality, in which young women strive to appear "respectable" to their peers and others (Skeggs 1997). However, as I've pointed out, these advertisements are often regarded as unrealistic, and women wearing 'laddered tights' could be perceived as challenging normative feminine ideals. For example, advertisements for Kate Moss's Topshop clothing range in 2009 featured her modelling 'laddered tights' (figure 27) and an accompanying article in 'Female First' magazine suggested 'if intoxicated hussy is the look you're going for then get yourself down to Topshop'.

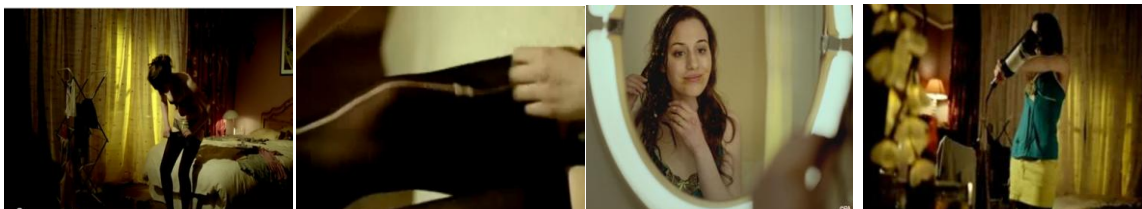


Figure 26: "You wouldn't start a night like this, so why end it that way?" KYL, 2008



Figure 27: Kate Moss modelling her Topshop range of clothing for autumn 2009 (FemaleFirst 2009)

Using the epitome ‘intoxicated hussy’ to describe Kate Moss’s ‘look’ could be viewed as ironically mocking the KYL advertisement. The latter suggests women do not want to have ripped tights as a consequence of an intoxicated night out, whereas the Topshop advert is perhaps promoting the idea that to be intoxicated and wear ripped tights is ‘sexy’; it’s a sign of what Gill (2009d:99) calls a postfeminist sensibility in which women are presented as ‘empowered, heterosexually desiring sexual subjects, operating playfully in a sexual marketplace that is presented as...favourable to women’. As Gill (2008a) suggests, ‘sexual agency’ becomes a form of regulation in these advertisements; requiring the re-moulding of feminine subjectivity to fit the current postfeminist, neoliberal moment in which young women should be not only beautiful, but sexy, sexually knowledgeable and always ‘up for it’. Thus, whilst the Government’s intention is to emphasise to women that their bodies will be scrutinised and evaluated and an ‘unacceptable body’ portrays failure, many young women regard their implication as unrealistic since they can potentially ‘get drunk’ **and** feel they look like Kate Moss.

Similar tactics that assume women will regret getting drunk underpin other Government campaigns such as the NHS ‘Cocktails’ campaign; a series of ‘viral’ videos of which the first entitled ‘Bloody Mary’ (DPCT 2009), shows a group of boisterous young men on a British high street at night who come across a drunken young woman urinating in public. The men call the young woman ‘disgusting’ and ‘gross’, and the advertisement’s message – that the evening has been ruined by alcohol – pivots on the woman’s seeming lack of control. And a poster campaign by the Drug and Alcohol Service for London in 2008 also focuses on the ‘body’ in addressing women about their alcohol consumption:



Figure 28: Poster campaign by the Drug and Alcohol Service for London (DASL 2008)

This gendered view of binge-drinking again reiterates the pervasive double-standard surrounding young women; the poster above clearly suggests women who drink excessively do not have access to a space of their own from which to drink, rather their capacity to drink is likened to that of 'a man' with the visual message that will resemble one too. The thinking behind this campaign was to 'appeal to women through their vanity', since DASL research revealed that two out of five women were worried about the physical impact of drink, and 'women are clearly not reacting to health warnings' (DASL 2008).

Gill (2007a:149) suggests, 'in today's media, possession of a 'sexy body' is presented as women's key source of identity', and the DASL campaign taps into postfeminist discourses, simultaneously present the 'feminine' body as a woman's source of power, but one that requires constant monitoring, surveillance and discipline. The words on the poster become a new mode of disciplinary power; respectful of women's own agency and autonomy (ideas central to both neoliberalism and postfeminism), the DASL cannot 'tell' women to stop drinking excessively, rather they work on the premise that women are fully responsible for their life biographies no matter how severe the constraints are upon their actions (Walkerdine, Lucey, and Melody 2001). Thus if women choose to drink heavily, this being almost 'compulsory' in the culture of intoxication (Griffin et al. 2009a), they will fail in their femininity because they will end up 'looking like a man'. Furthermore, the DASL is vilifying

all women who suffer 'hair loss, wrinkles and obesity' by implicitly suggesting they have made the 'wrong choices' irrespective of their circumstances.

Leisure is a key arena for risk-taking behaviour, and it is deeply gendered, both in terms of the places and spaces that young women occupy and their behaviour within such spaces. Such behaviours are also overlaid by differences of age, class, sexuality, 'race', ethnicity and culture, with risk deeply embedded in social and cultural discourses around female 'respectability' and reputation (Green and Singleton 2006). Measham and Østergaard (2009) reflect on the now familiar image of an intoxicated young working-class woman who frequents city centre bars and whose raucous behaviour results in her construction as 'the epitome of the feckless female "binge drinker"' (Griffin et al. 2009a:466). In the UK tabloid press, young women bear the blame for a binge-drinking culture due to wider transformations that are reconfiguring gender and class identity (Green and Singleton 2006). And due to neoliberal styles of governance and 'value' predicated on ideas of personal responsibility, investing in oneself and compulsory individuality, white working-class women have been refigured as the 'constitutive limit' to public morality (Skeggs 2005c). In being loud, vulgar and excessively drunk – characteristics commonly associated with the working-class (Skeggs 2005a; Tyler 2008), the body of the female binge drinker signals her immorality, and she becomes not only a 'threat to the state of the nation, but also to herself' (Skeggs 2005a:967).

Furthermore, despite the Government's various initiatives to reduce binge-drinking, little seems to have worked (Ball, Williamson, and Witton 2007; Plant and Plant 2006). Suggestions for this include a focus on 'individual' responsibility rather than a social one, particularly since alcohol plays a significant role in forming 'group identity' (Griffin et al. 2009b), and also young people do not identify with the campaigns' negative stance. Many young people see drinking 'to get drunk' as a normal but temporary part of their lives; they are not concerned about their levels of consumption (Seaman and Ikegwuonu 2010), or the long-term effects of excessive drinking.

When the Government's *Safe, Sensible, Social* strategy (DoH/HO 2007) was published stating that it was only a minority of 18-24 year old binge drinkers who were responsible for the majority of alcohol-related crime and disorder in the night-time economy (see appendix L), it raised the question as to why the Government did not increase alcohol tax to reduce such problems (IAS 2008b). However, since alcohol revenue to the Exchequer has been increasing over the last 30 years (IAS 2008c), with an estimated total contribution of £14.6 billion in 2009 (BBPA 2010), the drinks industry persuasively argued that increasing taxation

was not the solution. And Drummond (2004) suggests the lack of clear objectives in tackling the burden of excessive drinking maybe because Westminster is 'under the influence' and reluctant to put restrictions on the nation's drinking for fear of alienating the voting public. In response, the Government argues that alcohol-related harm should not be viewed in isolation, since alcohol consumption can also have positive effects; pointing out that 'over 1 million people being employed in hotels, pubs, bars, nightclubs and restaurants in the UK' (DoH/HO 2007:21) and the development of the evening economy is driven by the alcohol leisure industry, the government argues that these are positive effects in supporting the revival of city centres across England and Wales.

The Government, in addressing their specific concern for women's excessive drinking, has consulted a number of agencies including Alcohol Concern who issued a factsheet, *Women and alcohol – A call for concern?* In which they suggest that a 'historical knee-jerk reaction to the official statistics on women's increased drinking would not be the way forward' (see figures in appendix L). They suggest that a 'coherent strategy is needed to combat harmful drinking among women' (AlcoholConcern 2008a:5); but with Chatterton and Hollands's (2003:149) comments in mind: 'numerous commentators have noted the powerful influence young female consumers are having on the transformation of nightlife premises and cultures of cities', Alcohol Concern's suggestion does not appear to be foremost in the Government's mind. According to Measham and Brain (2005:278) 'simultaneous processes of economic deregulation and social regulation demonstrate the twin processes of seduction and repression which characterise consumer society'. One of the consequences of this is that whilst the alcohol industry is left free to 'seduce' the consumer, the Government's appeal to the individual's sense of personal responsibility fails to take into account the wider environmental context of young people's excessive alcohol consumption as pleasurable and 'fun'. These represent key themes in marketing alcohol to young people (Griffin et al. 2008), particularly women (EUCAM 2008). This creates a dilemma for young women since they are 'expected' and encouraged to participate in the UK's 'culture of intoxication', yet are still embroiled in a sexual double standard which constructs women excessive drinking as 'unfeminine'. And the UK tabloid press are keen to exploit current interest in women's drinking, 'glorifying' it through discourses of 'moral panic'.

3.5.3 Academic research on the 'culture of intoxication'

In this section I first discuss the quantitative research which tends to have a risk focus, and then current qualitative analysis of the 'culture of intoxication' (see appendix H for details of

studies). Within the qualitative research I look more specifically at how some studies take a different angle in showing how intoxication is pleasurable and social, and is made sense of within neoliberalism. Alongside analyses of drinkers themselves, academics also show how issues of gender and class are constituted through, and reflected in, alcohol consumption; and several studies of the alcohol industry also reveal how alcohol has been feminized, sexualised and classed. This will become the basis on which this study is built and in discussing what is missing from current research I outline what my research has to offer.

There is a plethora of studies that have considered the circumstances around, and motivations for, excessive alcohol consumption (e.g., Banister and Piacentini 2008), including extensive survey and statistically-based quantitative research providing evidence for perceptions, patterns and levels of alcohol consumption among young people (see appendix H). However, much of this work has a strong focus on young peoples' 'excessive consumption' as a form of 'risk', pursuing the dominant problem-oriented perspective in trying to link alcohol consumption with negative health and social outcomes; as a result young peoples' drinking practices have become the focus for sustained and pervasive discourse or moral panic in the areas of social policy, academic research and popular culture (Griffin et al. 2007; Measham and Brain 2005). Furthermore, these studies often followed the pattern of traditional classic psychology, focusing intently on the 'individual' rather than looking at the individual in 'context', and look at young people's motivations for drinking alcohol in isolation.

Qualitative studies of young people's drinking practices explored the *what*, *where* and *when* of alcohol consumption; in other words, what young people were drinking in terms of alcohol beverage types and amounts consumed, where drinking took place, i.e. parks, streets, venues, and when, i.e. during the week or just weekend drinking. And qualitative research has also explored the broader agenda of why young people participate in the 'culture of intoxication'.

3.5.3.1 'Why' do young people participate in the 'culture of intoxication'?

Current academic research tells us that young people participate in the 'culture of intoxication' because it is pleasurable and social; they like 'having fun'. 'Escapism' was perhaps the most cited motivation for more extreme drinking (Engineer et al. 2003; Van Wersch and Walker 2009); with some participants considering it their fundamental right to get drunk as a reward for working hard during the week (Parker and Williams 2003). Young people see the vibrancy of the UK's night time economy (NTE) and weekends of excess as a

cathartic release from a long week of work, and participating in the 'culture of intoxication' has become a 'normalised' means of maintaining successful work hard – play hard lifestyles (Parker 2005; Parker and Williams 2003). Similarly, Brain (2000) highlights how young drinkers 'mark out' pleasure spaces in which they can get drunk and 'let loose', away from the restraints of formal structures such as school, work and/or family life. Yet, like Parker and Williams participants, it's not a simple case of uncontrolled abandon, but rather a form of calculated and planned, rational hedonism (Brain 2000), organised around the pleasures of instant gratification in the leisure sphere (Griffin et al. 2009a, 2009b; Measham 2004a; Measham and Brain 2005; Szmigin et al. 2008).

Young people rarely describe themselves as 'binge' drinkers; instead researchers have found they use terms such as '*getting pissed*' (Lyons 2006:234), '*getting annihilated, wasted or mullered*' (Griffin et al. 2009a:466). And against a predominantly negative societal discourse young people tend to use positive language to describe their own drinking practices; for example, '*when you're...drunk...it's really really nice*' (Van Wersch and Walker 2009:130), and '[alcohol] *kind of makes fun times more fun*' (Lyons and Willott 2008:700). Ethnographic studies and in-depth interview research also detail how young people's desire to get drunk revolves around Friday and Saturday night drinking and 'getting annihilated', or reaching a stage of intoxication where one might lose consciousness which is often seen as a key marker of a 'fun' night out and a source of entertainment (Griffin et al. 2009a:469). Furthermore, young people's pursuit of '*determined drunkenness*' (Measham 2006) is not done in isolation, but revolves around a 'collective' culture of intoxication constituted in informal mixed and single-sex friendship groups (Griffin et al. 2009b:213). Researchers highlight how excessive drinking is often a key ingredient in 'occasions' that symbolise togetherness (Montemurro and McClure 2005; Pettigrew, Ryan, and Ogilvie 2001; Szmigin et al. 2008). For example, in explaining the role alcohol plays in facilitating social bonding between people, Szmigin et al. (2008:361) suggest alcohol marketers exploit the idea of 'engagement and enjoyment of alcohol as a site of play, sexualisation and juvenile humour'. Similarly, Sheehan and Ridge (2001:365) report that the girls in their study 'bond through their alcohol experiences and narratives', and Montemurro and McClure (2005) interpret excessive drinking as not only a required behaviour but as an 'in-group' activity identifying individuals as members of a social circle.

'Women only' rituals such as bachelorette/hen parties and 'ladies night' are another under-researched area yet a context in which heavy drinking is both condoned and encouraged. But excessive alcohol drinking is not always used for the sole purpose of getting inebriated, it is also 'fully entangled in socializing, playing a meaningful role in pleasure and

fun....belonging to the group' (Sheehan and Ridge 2001:357), and belonging to a group and feeling connected to a group is extremely important to many women. Thus, like the 'bachelorette party' (Montemurro and McClure 2005), these homogeneous women-only rituals focus on 'togetherness' **as well** as alcohol intoxication. And women-only groups do not *just happen* to consist of women, they are *deliberately only* women and 'women-only-ness' (Henrickson 2004:34) is an important aspect of women's drinking culture.

Young people also cite alcohol as aiding positive sexual experiences; for example, Coleman and Cater (2005) found that approximately 40% of their sample reported episodes of *intentional* protected sexual intercourse facilitated by alcohol consumption (although the authors do not offer any explanation for this). And reports from studies involving older participants highlight how the transition from childhood to adulthood affects the 'drinking for confidence' perception; for example, men generally moderated their drinking in female company, saying that being inebriated in the presence of females 'was not perceived as the right way to behave', and might lessen their success rate in 'pulling a bird' (Harnett et al. 2000:70). This concurs with my research in an earlier study, in which male respondents refrained from their normal 'binge' drinking activities if they were with potential girlfriends. The young men were keen to differentiate between 'girl-mates' and prospective 'girlfriends', and alcohol consumption made this distinction; 'girl-mates' were women who drank excessively and although admirably regarded for their capacity to drink, they were masculinized and de-sexualised in their construction as 'one of the lads'.

Despite the neoliberal emphasis on autonomous individuality (Rose 1999a), collective group drinking still plays a significant role in young people's social lives in offering not just fun and sociability, but also, for some, it is an essential source of protection – especially for young women (Griffin et al. 2009b:221). Participation in the 'culture of intoxication' is regarded as almost compulsory for young people today, and anyone 'choosing' not to drink, it seems, suffers the same social exclusion and stigmatisation as someone who drinks alone (e.g., the alcoholic). Nonetheless, whilst alcohol advertisers and marketers address the young drinking subject as part of a (gendered) collectivity (Griffin et al. 2009b), conversely the government, and indeed the media, fail to appreciate the importance of friendship groups and generally portray 'excessive' drinking as problematic and therefore an 'individual' issue. Additionally, government policy on alcohol (mis)use is premised on the politics of neoliberalism, in which 'neo-liberal conceptions and practices of freedom are distinctly ambivalent' (Reith 2004:285). For example, Parker and Williams (2003) concept of 'work hard-play hard' management highlights the paradox (alcohol) consumers face; they are expected to 'work hard', contribute to the economy, **and** be rational consumers, proving

themselves to be competent consumers. At the same time they are obliged to fulfil their lives and freely express themselves; and, for some, this means participating in the 'culture of intoxication' in which 'the pursuit of excitement is cultivated via this desire for immediate gratification' (Hayward 2004:16). In one sense, this can be seen as taking control of their lives in a neoliberal consumer society marked by competition, uncertainty and insecurity.

Nonetheless, it is only in the past decade that researchers have attempted to 'enter' the social worlds of young people and identify the role alcohol plays in constructing these social worlds (e.g., Griffin et al. 2009b; Measham 2004a). Furthermore, much of the psychological and sociological research on the cultural, social and psychological effects of alcohol tends to assume gender as a homogeneous category measured by a single tick box (Knaak 2004), and/or make static associations between women and femininity (and men and masculinity). This effectively erodes much of the diversity that exists within and among these categories (Dworkin 2005), including class, race and identity issues. And the same argument applies to consumer culture studies, as Schroeder (2003:1) states:

... 'gender is a pervasive filter through which individuals experience their social world, consumption activities are fundamentally gendered' (Bristor and Fischer 1993:519). However, gender rarely plays a central role in framing research, with notable exceptions, of course; but generally gender has become a boutique item in the mainstream mall of consumer research'

3.5.3.2 Research on gendered and classed drinking

There has been a tendency for studies that do address alcohol drinking and gender, class and identity issues, to focus on young men and masculinities (Capraro 2000; de Visser and Smith 2007; Lemle and Mishkind 1989; Mullen et al. 2007; Willott and Lyons 2011) and specific groups or communities; for example, the role of alcohol within student populations (Holt and Griffin 2005; Piacentini and Banister 2006), ethnic youth gangs (Hunt, MacKenzie, and Joe-Laidler 2005), and the importance of drinking in constructing regional identities such as the 'Geordie' identity in Newcastle-upon-Tyne (Nayak 2006). Notable exceptions are the works of Ettorre (1997) and Plant (1997; 2008a; 2008b), and a handful of studies which specifically explore women's experiences of excessive alcohol drinking in the UK (Day, Gough, and McFadden 2003; Measham and Østergaard 2009; Rolfe, Orford, and Dalton 2009; Rúdólfssdóttir and Morgan 2009). Nonetheless, as Hunt, Joe-Laidler and MacKenzie (2000:332) argue, societal concerns about women's drinking seem 'to have less

to do with worries about the pharmacologic impact of alcohol and more to do with political and symbolic concerns about the position of women within society'. And 'very few studies...examine alcohol consumption...from a woman's point of view' (Gefou-Madianou 1992:8). Furthermore, as Gefou-Madianou (1992) has critically pointed out, in terms of understanding the particular relationship between femininity and/or class and alcohol specifically, there has been little work carried out from a UK perspective. This is somewhat surprising given the significance and widely publicised role young British women have as, supposedly, the 'biggest (teenage) binge drinkers in western world' (The Guardian 2011).

McRobbie (2001:361) argues that in the twenty-first century, "Girls", including their bodies, their labour power and their social behaviour, are now the subject of governmentality [*the specified practices (techniques) of self-governing neoliberal subjectivities*¹³] to an unprecedented degree'. Thus, in recent years, women who 'do' alcohol drinking, in our women-friendly face-lift of the NTE, have supposedly generated a feminization of alcohol drinking practices. Certainly the general consensus among young women today is that they are pursuing their newfound right to equality; their newfound right to pleasure; and a pleasure they are now permitted to *visibly* indulge in (Clayton 2007). However there is a substantial amount of literature that views 'alcohol using bodies' as unable to control their desires, passions and needs, and for women this means transgressing normative femininity. And a number of concepts have been used to describe these transgressions, including 'loss of control' (Room 1985); 'embodied deviance' (Terry and Urla 1995); and 'excessive appetites' (Orford 2001); and they all imply compliance within the context of complex gendering processes which mark female [and male] bodies in alcohol drinking cultures (Ettorre 2004:330). Yet, despite this observation, the majority of studies work on an assumption that male and female drinking only differs in terms of consumption patterns, with much of the literature producing statistical comparisons. This has led to the development of prevention and education campaigns to tackle 'binge' drinking that may not necessarily be relevant to a female culture of drinking.

The few research studies that do show how young women's alcohol consumption offer useful insights into broader aspects of youth culture include Lyons and Willott's (2008) work which shows how female participants view themselves as active agents in their drinking; women who can 'hold' their alcohol 'well' are described positively, with men (as well as women) seemingly impressed with women who can drink as much as men. Lyons and Willott's (2008) participants draw on notions of gender 'equality' to explain the increase in

¹³ Governmentality: Foucault's "the conduct of conduct" - the government of one's self (subjectivation) through technologies of self.

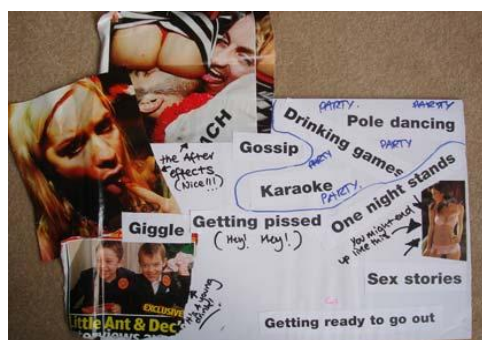
their drinking, with going out and drinking excessively regarded as simply doing 'equal stuff' to men. However, there is also evidence that 'double standards' are a key issue within this paper; female participants may position themselves as being 'equal' to men in the context of excessive drinking, but at the same time they acknowledge traditional discourses of femininity which require them to 'be in control'. For example, participants make comments such as '*maybe we're [women] meant to keep control all the time*', which suggests there is an expectation on women to behave in particular ways when they are out in public, and traditionally this involves being in control and acting responsibly. Thus the women do not directly resist or challenge the traditional associations between drinking, men or masculinity, nor do they argue for a space from which to drink as 'women'. Instead they draw on equating discourses to explain their own participation in this traditionally dominant masculine practice, and draw on traditional femininity discourses to position *other* women's drinking in public. For example, they use a process of 'othering' to denigrate specific groups of women, namely older women and women who were excessively drunk, describing '*other drunk women are not like our women drinkers*', '*I would interpret her as being slutty*', and '*a group of girls all tarted up in their crop tops...they're all drunk, it (just) looks like a real bad look*' (Lyons and Willott 2008:704-709).

I found it surprising that women themselves used this gendered double standard to condemn *other* women's drinking; it seemed as though they were objectifying and subordinating *other* female drinkers, and constructing them based on their appearance. For example, one of Lyon and Willott's participants comments that when she saw *other* girls she 'knew' that they were out looking for sex ('*you know what they're out for*', p.705); thus, constructing *other girls* as promiscuous and disrespectable pervasively reinforces the double standard around drinking and gender (Lyons and Willott 2008). On the other hand, underage female drinkers in Sheehan and Ridge's (2001) study, talk about the restrictions that traditional codes of femininity place on them in terms of drinking and its interpretation, but their transgressions (of such codes) is something they can share and laugh about.

There have also been a number of notable studies that show how not just gender, but also class, relates to alcohol consumption, in the UK and other countries. Measham and Østergaard (2009) provide an overview of recent changes in young women's alcohol consumption in the UK and Denmark, highlighting the underlying sexism that accompanies particular female drinker identities ('ladettes') and the excessive problematizing of young working-class women's 'public misdemeanours' in drinking contexts. And in Australia Lindsay (2006), for example, suggests that what, where and how young people drink is a simultaneous enactment and expression of class and gender. And, as outlined above,

Lyons and Willott (2008) work on young women's drinking in New Zealand. Australia and New Zealand are reportedly experiencing a similar 'culture of binge drinking' to that of the UK (ISCHP 2011) and research from both countries certainly offer insights into the ways that female drinking can be understood. However, I cannot automatically assume that these insights apply in the UK since the three countries differ in terms of history, licensing, government and media.

Research has also examined how 'girls/ladies' night out and 'bachelorette parties' have emerged as part of today's bedroom culture, in which drinking alcohol has become part of the female ritual of getting ready to go out; with 'dressing up' and 'putting on of make-up' being part of McRobbie's conceptualisation of bedroom culture in 1978. And again the idea of female togetherness and bonding is something alcohol advertising also hooks into; Hastings (2009) analysed internal alcohol industry marketing documents relating to the promotion of a number of brands between 2005 and 2008 including Lambrini, Smirnoff and WKD. His research revealed how producers of certain alcoholic brands explicitly target women and commission consumer research to 'help them get under the skin of their target audience' (Hastings 2009:16). For example, Lambrini commissioned advertising agency Cheethambell JWT to carry out research which involved asking young female participants to construct 'mood boards'; on these boards the researchers had already typed phrases such as "getting pissed", "one night stands", and "pole dancing":



Figures 29 & 30: 'Mood boards' research materials for Lambrini Qualitative Conclusions (Cheethambell 2006)

Hastings (2009:16) does not explain whether it is Lambrini or 'young women' he is referring to when he states: *'there is a clear connection in these consumers' minds between unwise and immoderate drinking behaviours – getting pissed, drinking games – and sexually irresponsible behaviour such as one night stands'*. However, I would argue that making this

assumption about young women is a form of sexism and an example of the pervasive double standard. In Lambrini's brief to the agency they described their target audience as:

'Younger female drinkers on a budget. Girls who like a drink and a laugh and who get a lot out of nights out (or in) with mates because it is a big release. They stay in Monday to Thursday, they watch soaps, they clip coupons, some have kids, some don't. They could be 18 but they could be 38 and acting 18. The main thing is that Friday to Sunday they have FUN. Having a laugh and getting a bit pissed is a big part of their life' (Hastings 2009:16)

This description, whilst acknowledging *'getting a bit pissed'* can be *'FUN'* and pleasurable for young women, is also implicitly marked with classism. McDowell's (2009) observation, that it is young working-class women who remain segregated in low-paid jobs, is implied in Lambrini's brief; references such as *'on a budget'*, *'watch soaps'*, *'clip coupons'* and inferring immaturity (*'could be 38 and acting 18'*) all echo the contemporary discourses of the 'townie', 'chav' and 'ladette' which tend to be applied to working-class women (Clisby 2009) (see also appendix I). Labelling a woman a 'townie' has also been used by the UK media to vilify young working-class young women out drinking, describing them as vulgar and sexually promiscuous (Hollands 2000). And, similarly, the word 'chav' 'has become a ubiquitous term of abuse for white working-class subjects' (Tyler 2008:17) who figures as the 'loud, white, drunk, excessive, disgusting, hen-partying woman' (Skeggs 2005a:965). Alcohol is also central to the 'ladette' identity, defined by the Oxford English Dictionary as a woman who is 'boisterously assertive and engages in heavy drinking sessions' (OED 2001). And Jackson and Tinkler (2007:255) point out that although ladette behaviours are represented as spanning social class groups, this does not eradicate their working-class associations; the *'excessive'* (drinking), *'disruptive'* (social order), *'crude'* (swearing), *'aggressive'*, *'open'* (sexual), behaviours attributed to ladettes remain associated with the 'least desirable', 'unrespectable' elements of working-class lifestyles (Skeggs 1997, 2004). Hastings (2009:17) adds that briefs for Lambrini campaigns revealed how they deliberately set out to be associated with 'bad behaviour', and he examples extracts of these briefs, taken from emails between Cheethambell JWT and Lambrini, such as *'quick female gags based on sex and drunkenness'* and FUN meaning *'being naughty, rude, outrageous or badly behaved'*.

Alternatively, Kilbourne (1999), in her condemnation of alcohol advertising aimed at women, argues that whilst messages of alcohol drinking as fun, sexy, desirable and harmless can also be seen in the mass media (e.g., films, music videos, sporting events and songs), their

primary purpose is to deliver audiences to advertisers. For example, she says Cosmopolitan (below) tries to convince the alcohol industry to advertise in its magazine by highlighting the number of their readers who drink beer and finishing with 'Isn't it time you gave Cosmopolitan a shot?'



Figure 31: 'Isn't it time you gave Cosmopolitan a shot?'
(Kilbourne 1999)

Despite the camaraderie and pleasure involved in these rituals, young women's participation in the 'culture of intoxication' is still often stigmatised and their behaviour regarded as transgressive – both in terms of what they wear and what they do. For example, according to the Urban Dictionary (UD 2003) a 'Girls' Night Out' is a planned event where a "group of females dress provocatively...return home late..in a drugged out or drunken stupor" [entries made by men], whereas a 'Lads' Night Out' is very briefly described as "activities which include: drinking (alcohol), gambling, the muffin game..and more" (UD 2007). Perceiving young women's enjoyment as transgressive underpins discourses of respectability and, as Skeggs's (1997) work shows, 'respectability' is always an issue in the subjective construction of working-class identities (especially those of women). Walkerdine (1996) argues that to ignore social class is to render invisible the experiences and voices of working-class women, since much psychological investigation (including feminist) assumes middle-class values (see also Skeggs 1997). And in the UK particularly, where Government policy on alcohol consumption adopts a new form of neo-liberal governance by proposing 'sensible' drinking is a matter of individual 'personal responsibility', young white working-class women are 'framed by associations of contagion, pollution, danger, distaste, and excessive heterosexuality' in becoming the limit sign for respectability Skeggs (2005a:966). Skeggs demonstrates this,

describing the 'hen' partier as 'the loud, excessive, drunk, vulgar, disgusting and publicly immoral white working-class woman who is a 'handy figure for the government to.....identify as a "social problem"'; all the 'moral obsessions' historically associated with the working-classes are now contained in one body – a body beyond governance and a body that signals class through moral euphemism (Skeggs 2005a:965). With young women's increasing 'visibility' in public, they are also expected to subject themselves to new norms of appearance and self-presentation (McRobbie 2009:60), yet at the same time, attempts to control the visibility of feminine sexuality within the terms of traditional gender hierarchies, often turns bodies of desire into bodies of disgust using the language of moral outrage (Papayanis 2000). Both Ahmed (2004) and Tyler (2006, 2008) make a connection between disgust and social power relations which echoes Skeggs' account of 'class-making' and boundary-forming, which is also often taken up through a process of '*Othering*'; using a discourse of bodily abjection to define those women that act outside the norms of traditional femininity.

On the other hand, Day, Gough and McFadden's (2003) work, highlights how women's physical aggression can be understood as important in constructing working-class femininities in the context of 'nights out' drinking. Through their analysis they were able to show how aggression could be seen 'positively' as a way of resisting and rejecting dominant middle-class femininities and thus as an expression of agency and power; however, women's aggression against each other, including non-physical forms of aggression such as direct and indirect verbal aggression, could also be seen as reproducing 'damaging masculine scripts' (Day, Gough, and McFadden 2003:154). RÚDÓLFSDÓTTIR and Morgan (2009) work also reveals how a group of middle-class women, aged 18-22, position 'other' groups of women as alleged 'problem drinkers' in terms of class, and how it also gives them a voice of moral authority – constructing young women who drink excessively as immoral and unfeminine in their behaviour. Similarly, Rolfe, Orford and Dalton's (2009) study highlights how a number of female heavy drinkers (aged 28-56) resist and negotiate stigmatizing subject positions of the 'woman drinker' in order to both justify their drinking and protect their moral status as 'good women'.

Nevertheless, research on women's drinking practices is limited, and a number of researchers have highlighted the need for an analysis of how alcohol consumption is constructed and contextualised in a gendered and classed way (Day, Gough, and McFadden 2003, 2004; Measham and Østergaard 2009). Both Measham (2002) and Hutton (2004, 2006) carried out research looking at the socio-cultural context of women and drug use, showing how women's recreational drug use is set within a larger cultural context that

reaffirms both traditional and non-traditional forms of femininity; for example, Measham (2002:362) shows how women's drug use can facilitate this through the construct of the 'club babe', balancing being sexually attractive and sexually active with not being sexually promiscuous. However Measham does not specifically analyse alcohol. And whilst Lindsay's (2006) investigation of the dance club scene in Melbourne, Australia, shows how drinking venues have become feminised, and how young people's choice of venue represents their identity in terms of class and femininity; Day (2010), on the other hand, argues that, in Britain, drinking cultures have not been feminised, rather, women's drinking in NTE venues operate within a class-based construction of femininity. As Day and her colleagues found, in an earlier study, middle-class women invested in idealised images of femininity (as passive and respectable) to a greater degree than working-class women, in terms of how women should conduct themselves in drinking spaces (Day, Gough, and McFadden 2003). Yet, as Day (2010) points out, working-class women are not rejecting these feminine ideals, informed by middle-class values, rather these images are inaccessible to them. Lindsay's (2006) research highlights similar findings, with women frequenting more commercial (middle-class) night clubs enacting a more emphasised form of femininity.

Certainly, young women's [and young men's] extreme alcohol consumption is unsettling for the neoliberal project because of their apparent 'refusal to inhabit the position of responsible, moderate and rational subjectivity' (Griffin et al. 2009a:470). And whilst there is a neoliberal emphasis on obligatory freedom, young people often perceive excessive drinking as an 'obligatory freedom'; getting drunk as a means of expressing themselves which has become socially acceptable (and expected). Griffin (2005:11) argues that young women today 'must drink alcohol if they wish to socialise', with compulsory 'fun' being an essential part of young people's leisure. And as both Griffin (2005) and Jackson (2006:471) point out, Cyndi Lauper sang, in the 1980s, '*girls just wanna have fun*', yet within neo-liberal discourse it takes on 'a different complexion', and now she'd be singing '*girls just gotta have fun*'.

3.6 Summary: constructing the neoliberal, postfeminist female consumer in the UK's 'culture of intoxication'

In drawing chapters two and three together, it becomes clear that young women have to negotiate a context of complex and contradictory forms of sense making about what it means to be a 'good' woman, which are riven with classed judgements and expectations to participate, yet presented as individual autonomous choices of the liberated woman who can use consumption practices to produce her desired self.

Needless to say, the ways in which young women are presented in the UK media, government policies and advertising emphasise these complexities; blurring mixed messages of concern about their wellbeing whilst heralding young women as 'vanguards of new subjectivity' (Harris 2004b). These messages are both celebratory and regulatory, contrasting stories of women's apparent successes with portrayals of young women as 'failing', particularly when it comes to alcohol drinking in public. Furthermore, success is based on the idea women are now benefiting from social, political and economic changes within the UK; young women appear to be the 'privileged subjects' (McRobbie 2009:59), surrounded by discourses of capacity, success, attainment, enjoyment, entitlement, social mobility, participation, and equality which emphasise what young women 'can do' regardless of their circumstances. Not 'making it', on the other hand, is interpreted 'through a toxic discourse of individual failure' (Gill 2011:63), and the intense surveillance of women's bodies in the media means women are always at risk of 'failing' (Gill 2007a). This can be seen, in part, in the ubiquitous use of terms such as 'chav(ette)' (Tyler 2008), 'ladette' (Jackson and Tinkler 2007) and 'slut' (Ringrose and Renold 2012) which constitute forms of classed (hetero)sexism.

Not only do these contradictory messages operate within the fields of education, employment and citizenship, but they also apply in women's consumption. As I have highlighted, women have always been required to 'look nice', even judged entirely by their looks (Wolf 1990), for the assumed external male gaze. However, now, the objectifying male gaze is internalised to form a new disciplinary regime (Bartky 1990; Bordo 2003) which offers women the promise of power by becoming an object of desire; supposedly they can and do 'choose' to become sex objects because it suits their 'liberated' interests to do so (Gill 2003:104). This shift, from objectification to what Gill describes as sexual subjectification, has led to an re-inscription of feminine practices and forms of self-presentation that were once regarded as connected to subordination (Gill 2009d). For women, this means the consumption of numerous beauty products and procedures, and their constant attendance to appearance, in order to conform to ever-narrower judgements of female attractiveness – all under the guise that they are 'pleasing themselves'!

As well as the processes and products of sexual subjectification, a significant consumption practice is around alcohol, and again young women are left in a nexus of contradictory discourses. Whether young women are 'choosing' to participate, or expected to participate (both of which are applicable) in the 'culture of intoxication', as 'binge' drinkers they are seen, by both the media and government, as hedonistic, excessive, irrational and transgressive; the antithesis of the rational, self-governing, moral individual that is the ideal

neoliberal subject. And traditional and current discourses overlap and co-exist in talk about their drinking, with their behaviour being simultaneously pathologized as a health issue if they drink too much (in terms of alcohol policy definitions), and their femininity pathologized as either transgressive, feckless and not feminine enough. Thus, it is not only young women's excessive alcohol consumption that is seen as transgressive (in terms of neoliberal ideals), but their hyper-sexualised appearance in public is simultaneously seen as transgressing 'traditional codes of femininity' and therefore deviant, yet 'freely' chosen and a sign of female assertiveness, thus perhaps progressive in postfeminist terms.

Similarly, the alcohol industry, in constructing identities through consumption, relies on a form of postfeminist 'sexual subjectification' in targeting the growing number of young women drinkers. In their appeal to the female 'binge' drinker, they provide young women with access to the public sphere – the UK's NTE; and young women often see this as an opportunity/necessity to dress up, consume alcoholic drinks specifically branded for them, and visit venues designed to appeal to the new feisty, sassy, agentic female. Thus, the alcohol industry does not see female 'binge' drinking as the antithesis of neoliberal ideals, rather it sees it as their (postfeminist) apotheosis (Haydock 2009a).

There are still significant gaps in young women's sense making of these contradictory discourses; young women are frequently 'talked about', yet their own voices are rarely heard in all the speculation about their increased alcohol consumption and hyper-sexualised appearances, and the effects they has on their health and social status. Thus, by listening to young women's own opinions and voices, I hope to provide a better understanding of what it is like to be a young woman today participating in the UK's 'culture of intoxication' (Measham and Brain 2005).

I use a feminist poststructuralist framework to make visible the complex dynamics and complicities in play at the moment (a neoliberal, postfeminist time) for young women. Through my analysis of a localised group of young women's sense making, I will add to our understanding of the intimate relationship between the culture and subjectivity, and how "what's out there" gets "in here" to reconstruct these particular women's deepest yearnings and sense of self (Gill 2011:66).

Chapter Four: Methodology – placing young women and alcohol consumption within a feminist poststructuralist framework

4.1 Introduction

This study draws upon feminist research methodology, and in this chapter I outline the approach I took in detail. I explain the aims of my study, and then outline some of the key theories behind feminist methodological research and how my epistemological approach emphasises the importance of my participants' perspectives with regard to their alcohol consumption. I explain the rationale for choosing my research strategy and design, which includes participant observation, informal individual interviews and friendship group interviews, in addition to text-based research on government and media documentation. I outline how I recruited my participants and how my fieldwork unfolded in practice. I discuss my approach to discourse analysis, based on a six stage form of Foucauldian discourse analysis (Willig 2008); justifying its usefulness in terms of this research, and including a full breakdown of the analytical steps I applied to the texts collected. I then discuss the ways in which I negotiated issues of ethics, which revolved around the concept of informed consent, and validity, and were based on providing an open account of the research process. Finally, I offer a personal reflexive account of my own role in the research process.

4.2 Aims of the study

Chapters two and three introduced the subject matter of, and the theoretical backgrounds to, this study. Both chapters highlight how discourses of postfeminism and neoliberalism work together in creating contradictory and complex subject positions for young women in the field of consumer culture. Young women are expected to participate in the culture of intoxication, yet their behaviour is deemed 'unfeminine' if they get drunk. They are also expected to construct and maintain a hyper-sexualised feminine appearance, and this is not only difficult to 'do' when intoxicated, but, for working-class women, it is inherently problematic. In feminist writing especially, questions of agency have been of particular concern in postfeminist and neoliberal contexts in which women (particularly young women) are often presented as autonomous, agentic and empowered subjects. It seems, in these contexts, as though the older language of feminism, which speaks of domination, inequality and oppression, has been 'accounted for' and subsequently replaced by something more celebratory (Gill and Scharff 2011).

In light of what Measham and Østergaard (2009:425) refer to as 'a hypersexuality within the 'new' 21st century NTE environment' and a call for research that explores further the gendering of drinking, drinking environments, and drinking cultures, I aim to add to our understanding of how women are taking up, resisting, or otherwise negotiating neoliberal and postfeminist discourses in the context of alcohol drinking. In particular, the dilemmatic relationships between female extreme alcohol drinking and postfeminist discourses of femininity sometimes constructed as hyper-femininity, and how these accounts and practices are situated within a wider cultural context.

In seeking to understand the multiple ways in which young women 'do' contemporary femininity, I also pay particular attention to the way in which class plays out across female bodies; the 'culture of intoxication' represents an important site for negotiating (classed) postfeminist subjectivity (Skeggs 2005a). Thus it is within this culture that I explore how young women make sense of the centrality of both excessive drinking and hyper-sexualised forms of femininity in their social lives.

It is from these aims, in conjunction with chapters two and three, that a central research question and several sub-questions were derived:

RQ: How do young women constitute forms of femininity and experience their positioning within the 'culture of intoxication'?

1. How do young women 'do' excessive drinking as a practice, and how do they make sense of these practices?
2. What are the relationships between young women's excessive alcohol consumption and postfeminist hyper-sexualised femininity, and the wider discourses of femininity and consumption?
3. How do young women account for their participation in excessive alcohol consumption and hyper-sexualised femininity? (What subject positions do they draw on to make sense of these practices and what are the consequences for them in doing so?)
4. What does this analysis tell us about the management of twenty-first century femininity in the UK?

4.3 Feminist Methodology

Despite ongoing debate over what constitutes feminist methodology, and the idea that any distinctively feminist approach to methodology is problematic (Harding 1987; Ramazanoğlu and Holland 2002; Wise and Stanley 2003), Weedon (1997:1) sums up 'feminism' as an overarching term to describe a movement, a set of beliefs or 'a politics'. Within feminism, as with any movement, there will be numerous feminisms and multiple feminist perspectives, with different emphases and aims, on research methods (DeVault 1996; Reinharz 1992). Thus an appreciation of what feminist methodology entails requires a prior understanding of what is meant by the term 'methodology' - it is 'not simply a posh way of saying method' (Skinner, Hester, and Malos 2005:9).

Methodology incorporates ontological and epistemological reflection, and it is differing feminists' positions, in light of these reflections, that create debate. For example, feminist empiricism employs a realist ontology; a modified objectivist epistemology; and uses traditional research methods and conventional benchmarks of 'rigor', including internal and external validity, and reliability (Denzin and Lincoln 1994). Feminist standpoint theories, on the other hand, reject traditional research methods and argue that validity of research findings can be determined through the lens of subjectivity and self-reflexivity (Rutherford and Granek 2010). And whereas standpoint theorists (e.g., Harding 1986; Smith 1990a, 1990b) take women's everyday experiences as authoritative and therefore a measure of reality, poststructuralist feminists problematise experience as authoritative evidence, emphasising instead the discursive constructions which effect women's experiences and interpretations; and it is a poststructuralist feminist position that I assume as the researcher.

4.3.1 Feminist ethnography

As with feminist methodology, ethnography has also been defined in different ways and again there seems to be no consensus about any definition. Furthermore, it has been approached as both a method and a methodology. Nonetheless, as my aim was to explore a localised group of young women's sense-making of alcohol drinking practices, and the possibilities available to them for doing 'new' femininities, it made sense to study several existing friendship groups of young women 'going out' drinking in the NTE, and an ethnographic design was therefore the most appropriate. As Skeggs (1994:88) argues:

'Feminist ethnography can contribute to a wider feminist project by giving knowledge a practical relevance and by exposing the constructions of knowledge as a form of control and categorization. Feminist ethnography can account for the practice of different women, at different times, in different places. It can increase the specificity of analysis by providing an economic, institutional, social and discursive context. It can bring into question universalistic or homogenous theories which speak from a position of privilege. Feminist ethnography shows how women make history but not in the conditions of their own choosing. It can show how feminist ethnographers do the same.'

Thus, as Skeggs points out in this extract, using feminist ethnography should tell me something about the lives of my participants, and also about knowledge construction itself. I am therefore taking an ethnographic approach which involves a range of methods to explore the lives of my participants; the main data gathering methods were individual interviews and group discussions, but I also use observations and informal conversations. This involved my direct and sustained contact with my female participants, within the context of their social lives, watching what happened, listening to what was said, asking questions, and producing a richly written account that, respects the irreducibility of the women's experiences, and acknowledges the role of theory as well as the my own role in the study (O'Reilly 2005).

4.4 Epistemology

I define this research project as feminist, drawing on Letherby's (2003:73) guidelines in which she states firmly that all feminist researchers should:

- Give continuous and reflexive attention to the significance of gender as an aspect of all social life and within research, and consider further the significance of other differences between women and (some argue) the relevance of men's lives to a feminist understanding of the world;
- Provide a challenge to the norm of 'objectivity' that assumes knowledge can be collected in a pure, uncontaminated way;
- Value the personal and the private as worthy of study;
- Develop non-exploitative relationships within research;
- Value reflexivity and emotion as a source of insight as well as an essential part of research.

After reading numerous texts on feminism, poststructuralist theory, and Foucault, and in particular, the works of Weedon (1997), Ramazanoğlu and Holland (2002), and McLaren (2002), I found it possible to draw on similarities in the definition of what constitutes a feminist research procedure, which enabled me to develop a rich understanding of what my

participants are saying. What does make my project specifically 'feminist' is its stress on 'the necessity of continuously and reflexively attending to the significance of gender' (Reinharz 1992:46) in the research process, research design and data analysis.

I subscribe to a relativist standpoint - that there is no such thing as 'pure experience', and that cultural and discursive resources are used in order to construct different versions of experience within different contexts (Willig 2008). This standpoint challenges the view that conventional knowledge is based upon objective, impartial and unbiased observations of the world, and therefore stands in opposition to positivism and empiricism (Burr 1995; Willig 2008). In keeping with a relativist standpoint, the theoretical framework of my methodology is broadly within a feminist poststructuralist perspective that sees knowledge as socio-historically constructed and situated and inherently unstable.

Weedon (1997) claims that poststructuralism offers a useful conceptual foundation for feminist practice. And she describes feminist poststructuralism as 'a mode of knowledge production which uses poststructuralist theories of language, subjectivity, social process and institutions to understand existing power relations and to identify areas and strategies for change' (Weedon 1997:40). However, as I pointed out earlier, within much feminist analyses there is a standpoint, empirical research tradition which places emphasis on women's speaking '*from experience*' as though it has an unquestionable authority about it (Gavey 1989). I do not deny that feminist emphasis on women's experience is important, particularly as a political strategy, which has given voice to women's oppression by, and resistance to, patriarchal prescriptions; however, a poststructuralist feminist approach assumes that 'experience has no inherent essential meaning' (Weedon 1997:33). Weedon's feminist poststructuralism is particularly influenced by the Foucauldian idea that language is always located in discourse, and we acquire language through a range of discourses which are often contradictory and constitute conflicting versions of social reality. Through language we learn to give voice – meaning – to our experience, and it is these experiences, these ways of thinking, and the positions with which we identify, that structure our sense of ourselves (our subjectivity) (Weedon 1997). Thus we are both the products and producers of knowledge, and our 'selves' and meaning can never be fixed or essential.

Weedon (1997) argues that theory must be able to address women's experience by showing where these experiences come from, and how they relate to material social practices and the power relations that structure them. Having grown up within a particular system of meanings and values, we inherit ways of understanding; we inherit the meanings associated with social positions, such as 'woman' and 'working-class', and positions in

knowledge (Skeggs 1997:9). We may also 'move out of familiar circles, through education or politics, for example, and are exposed to alternative ways of constituting the meaning of our experience' (Weedon 1997:33). Discourses are multiple, offering 'subject positions', or 'possibilities' for constituting subjectivity, for women to take up, and these vary in terms of the power they offer (Gavey 1989). Whilst the possibilities for taking up subject positions depend on their location within wider discourses and institutions, individuals are not passive, rather they have 'choice' in the ways they position themselves and invest in various discourses (Skeggs 1997). For example, the young women in this study might identify with and conform to traditional discursive constructions of femininity, or they may resist, reject, and challenge them. However, rather than being a simple matter of rational choice (a humanist conception of the individual), the young women are products of a discursive battle in which their 'subjectivities are precarious, contradictory and in process, constantly being reconstituted in discourse each time they think or speak' (Weedon 1997:32).

In light of these explanations, I take up my investigation of gendered and classed excessive drinking practices through a feminist approach. Whilst not all forms of poststructuralism are productive for feminism, Weedon (1997) suggests Foucauldian theory is arguably of most interest to feminist poststructuralist research. In his theory of discourse, power and resistance, Foucault insists on historical specificity; furthermore, he conceptualises the relationship between discourses, the sites where they are articulated (social institutions) and individual constituted experiences. It is from this perspective that we can best address specific forms of power exercised in society and attempt to contest them (Weedon 1997:121).

Therefore, by situating my methodology within a feminist poststructuralist framework and drawing on Foucauldian theory, I aim to gain an understanding of the ways in which a particular group of young women construct their subjectivities through excessive alcohol drinking. Through their sense-making within this context, I seek to address the implications for feminism by exploring the ways in which power is exercised in informing young women's constructions of (hyper-sexualised) femininity.

4.5 Research Design

4.5.1 Research design outline

This study is an in-depth qualitative project in which I observe and analyse a group of young women's accounts of their social excessive drinking practices in relation to current debates about postfeminism, the sexualisation of women, social class and 'new' femininities. By conducting an in-depth exploration of how a group of relatively homogenous young women engage and negotiate with postfeminist drinking cultures, my thesis focuses on exploring how a postfeminist sentiment may be translated into practice by a specific social group, allowing an analysis of both the participants' sense making and some of the factors that structure the kinds of discourses they can take up and make their own. To do this I used the qualitative in-depth interview as my method for collecting data as it is well suited to providing an insight into subjective experiences and meanings (Rubin and Rubin 2005). My sample was an opportunistic one; I recruited two women through my role as a youth worker and used a snowballing technique to recruit further participants; this enabled in-depth access to a relatively homogenous group of women (working-class, white, able, heterosexual).

Social class was not an area of focus at the beginning of this study; however, a detailed analysis of the interview transcripts revealed that class formed a pervasive, if somewhat implicit, theme in the young women's accounts and worthy of further attention. Thus whilst I did not set out to recruit working-class young women, but 'young women', nonetheless, the majority of my participants would be considered working-class (see 4.5.2:112 for social class classification system); and because their talk oriented to their class location, class became a significant thread in my analysis of these young women's negotiations of postfeminism, neoliberalism and consumption within the context of the night time economy and excessive drinking (for rationale for the different methods employed see procedure section below in this the chapter).

Thirty-three young women took part in the study, aged between 18 and 24 years, and all lived in the county of Hampshire, regularly going 'go out' drinking in a number of towns and city centres in southern England. It is important to reiterate here that these young women are not representative of a 'generalised population' and their narratives are personal and localised.

I conducted three phases of data collection between August 2009 and May 2010; firstly, I carried out twenty-three semi-structured individual interviews, followed by four friendship group interviews which involved the twenty-three women who had already taken part (in

individual interviews), together with ten additional young women. Both techniques involved a loosely-based interview schedule with topics relating to my research questions and designed to facilitate flexible discussion. The individual interviews took between one and two hours, and the group discussions between two and three hours, and I invited each participant to contact me, following the interview, if they wished to add to anything said. Both individual and group interviews produced in-depth narratives, in which the young women constructed and negotiated discourses of femininity, gender and class in 'going out', and how these intertwined with their drinking practices enabling them to take up particular subject positions. The third phase of my study involved ethnographic participant interaction/observation, and visual data.

The flow chart below details my data collection schedule in terms of when I carried out the interviews and group discussions and my 'nights out' with participants:

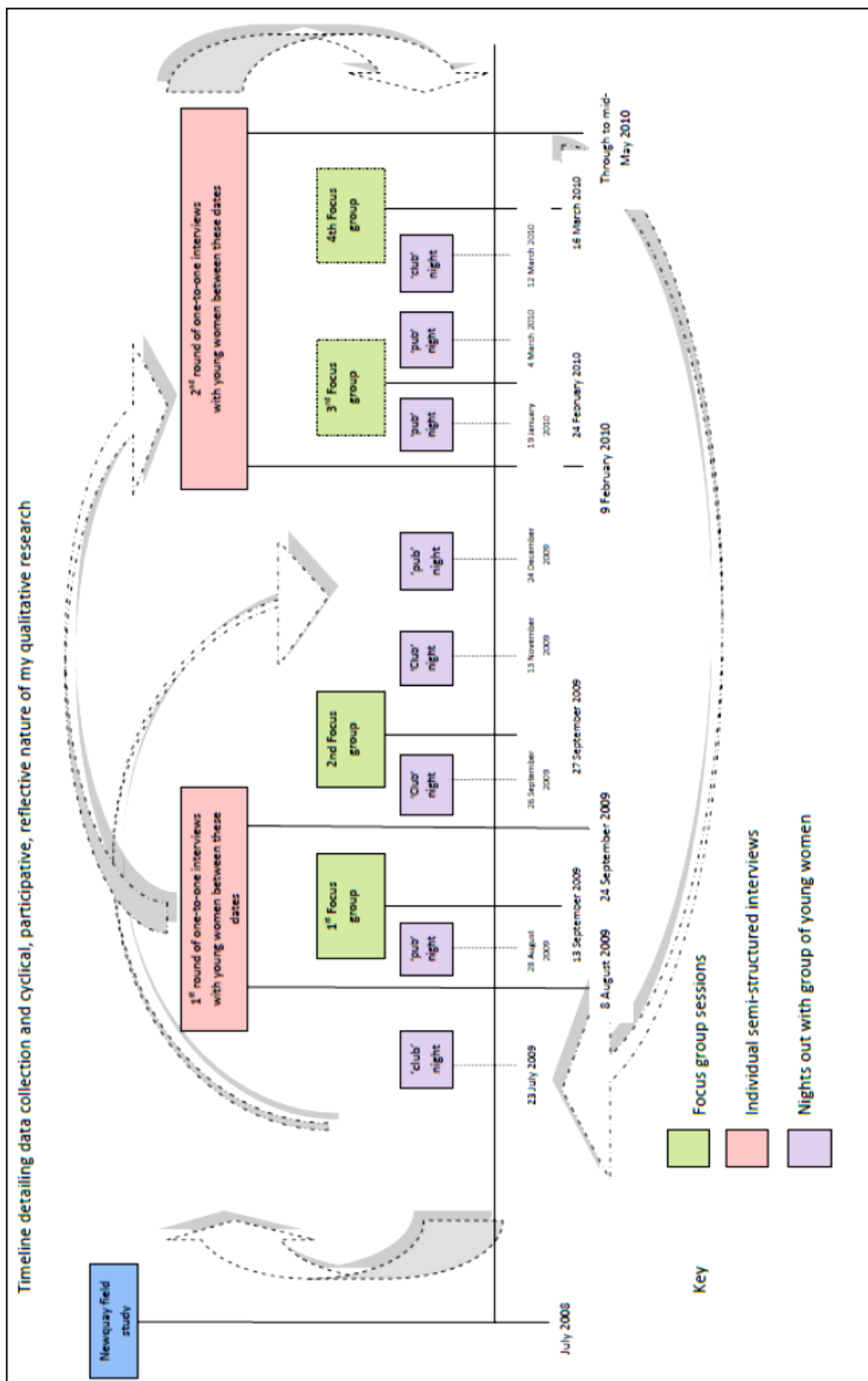


Figure 32: Research data collection timeline

4.5.2 Profile of research participants

Research participants in this study were young women who regularly socialised in pubs, bars and clubs. Whilst the term ‘young women’ is somewhat ambiguous, for the purpose of this study, I define ‘young women’ as between the age of 18 and 24 years. The lower age limit of 18 years reflects the legal age for drinking alcohol in licensed premises in the UK (although I acknowledge that women under the age of 18 may be socialising and drinking alcohol in NTE venues). Nonetheless, my three main reasons for focusing on this particular age group are, firstly, consumption of alcohol by women in the UK who fall within this age group has been rising since the 1980s, and they consume more alcohol than women in any other age range. For example, the table below shows the trends in women’s drinking more than 6 units a day (which the government refer to as ‘binge’ drinking), by age group, between 1998 and 2006:

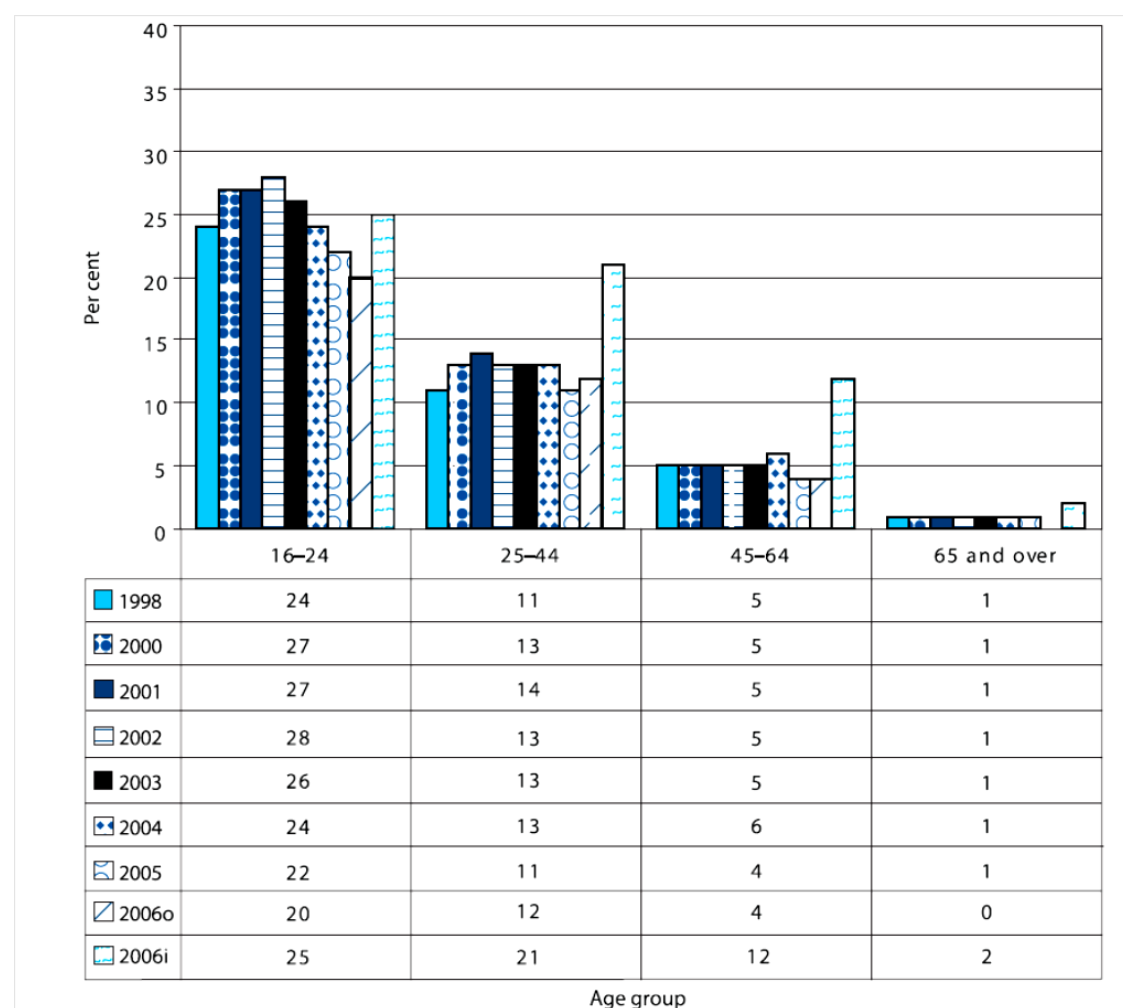


Table 2: Trends in the proportion of women in the UK drinking more than 6 units on any one day in the last week, 1998 to 2006, by age (Smith and Foxcroft 2009; source: GHS 2006)

Secondly, the UK drinks industry is increasingly targeting women, within this age range, as consumers of alcohol, seeing them as crucial in the development of the NTE; and this can also be seen in UK government and media reaction to young women's increased drinking. Finally, and pertinently, it is young women who appear to be the ideal subjects for taking on new modes of femininity in contemporary culture, at a moment that is arguably distinctively neoliberal and postfeminist (Gill 2008b; Gill and Scharff 2011; McRobbie 2008, 2009). Similarly, I was also interested in the way that gender and class interact for this age group, and recruited young women who were mainly from what would be considered traditionally as working-class backgrounds.

Thirty-three women, between the ages of 18 and 24 (exception: Roxy aged 27), took part in the study. All my participants lived in a town in Hampshire at the time they were interviewed, however their drinking accounts differentiated by location and context. For example, drinking in their home town meant 'dressing down' and consuming less alcohol, whereas drinking in cities [e.g., Portsmouth, Southampton] in the county, was defined as a reason for 'dressing up' and excessively drinking. All the interviews took place between August 2009 and May 2010 (see figure 32, p.110), with all of the women identifying themselves as white, heterosexual, and most of them as single; 'Dora' was the only woman, during this period of data collection, to have a child. To assess their 'class' status I asked the women to describe their backgrounds and most self-identified as middle class. However, if I was to infer the class status from their occupational status using the National Statistics socio-economic classification system (NS-SEC)¹⁴ most of the women would be classified as working class. My assessment is based on the participants being in jobs classified as L10-L14 (full version of NS-SEC) when jobs in L10-14 may be classified as 'working class' (see appendix P for details of this classification system). A possible explanation for the difference between how the participants classified themselves and official definitions may be due to the negativity of being labelled as, or identifying oneself as, working-class (Nayak 2006; Tyler 2008), and I explored this during my analysis. See appendix O for outline of participants' details and appendix P for details of NS-SEC (ONS 2005; Rose and O'Reilly 1998).

The social map below, figure 33, shows the women involved in the four friendship groups and their relationship, if there is one, to other participants in the study, and participants that took part in individual interviews:

¹⁴ In 1998 the UK government social classification system was reviewed (Rose and O'Reilly 1998) and In 2001 the National Statistics Socio-economic Classification (NS-SEC) replaced the two socio-economic classifications (SECs), widely used in the UK in both official statistics and academic research (ONS 2005:2): Social Class by Occupation (SC, also known as Registrar General's Social Class) and Socio-economic Group (SEG), as the official socio-economic classification in the UK (Rose and Pevalin 2003).

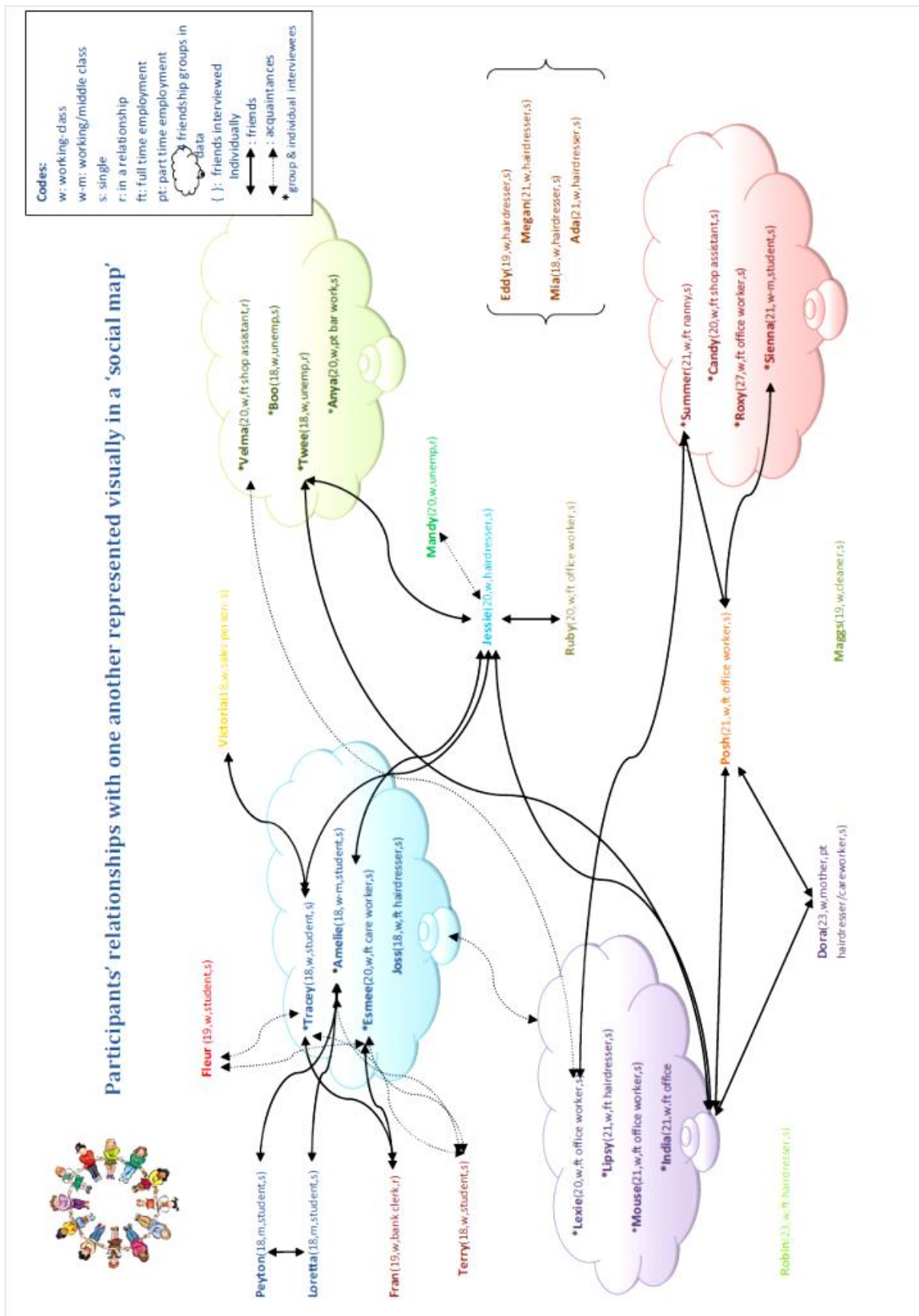


Figure 33: Social map of participants (by pseudonym, including age, class, relationship status, employment status and involvement in study)

4.5.3 Location

In order to 'place' my participants' experiences and sense-making of 'nights out' in context, geographical location does have an influence on their socialising and drinking alcohol in terms of access, as well as differences in tolerance thresholds and expectations of 'appropriate' behaviour (Valentine et al. 2007). Furthermore, Leyshon's (2005, 2008) work on youth identity, culture and marginalisation in the countryside shows how young men drinking in village pubs use exclusive, hierarchical, sexist discourse which serves to marginalise young women through a process of 'othering'. On the other hand, Leyshon (2008:267) also shows how rural young women employ various embodied strategies to move between spaces to experiment with alcohol and 'alternative' femininities, and 'do' gender, thereby contesting acceptable rural gender roles and expectations. And Holt and Griffin (2005) found a distinction between students and locals' talk about 'going out' drinking based on social class distinction. The findings in these various studies became relevant during my analysis, in the ways my female participants used 'locality' as a means of 'othering'.

My female participants live in a town, which they have given the pseudonym 'Atown'; a name they often refer to amongst themselves, and one I can use in providing a certain amount of information about the town without compromising their confidentiality and anonymity. Atown, a historic 'market' town, had a population, in the last census, of 16,051 (ONS 2001) and is situated within the county of Hampshire, the third largest 'shire' in England (in population terms). The county is described as having 'two major cities (Portsmouth and Southampton), several other large towns, a series of smaller market towns and a myriad of villages in an extensive rural area' (HCC 2011a:i; see map below), and is relatively affluent with a 'high cost, high income, broad based, and service orientated economy' (SEEC 2012). However, the county does have areas of high social deprivation, including parts of Atown (HCC 2011b). The town has little ethnic diversity compared to a national scale, most residents are white; and, in terms of class, Atown is a predominantly middle-class location with a proportion of working-class people (EHDC 2011).



Figure 34: map of Hampshire, with boundary line in red and bordering counties.
(Source: Ordnance Survey data © Crown copyright and database rights 2010)

Despite its relatively small size, Atown, renowned for its brewing heritage, has managed to retain a very large number of pubs and licensed premises selling alcohol (my estimate 30 within half mile of town centre), which does not reflect the closure of many pubs, in other parts of the UK, partly due to the economic downturn in the UK (Muir 2012). Increasing numbers of young people, from surrounding towns and villages, can now be found in Atown, attracted to its 'beacon' status sixth form college and the diversity of drinking venues. Atown also has a railway station and bus routes to a number of larger towns and cities, most within a 30 mile radius, which provide a wider range of large chain licensed bars, nightclubs with late night entertainment, clubs specifically for lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender (LGBT) clientele, for example, clubs which offer different music genres on dedicated nights (e.g., R&B, hip-hop, dance), and bars which have promotional nights, such as 'student nights' when alcoholic drinks are sold at reduced prices.

As my research involved participants living in this specific area I examined localised statistics and websites for information on Atown and Hampshire. I found a local government report stating that ‘female drinkers pose a significant issue for alcohol-related hospital admissions over males in Hampshire’ (Bartle 2009:15, table 3 below), and several districts within Hampshire reporting the highest figures for alcohol-related death and alcohol-related crime for the South East of England (Sheehan 2007).

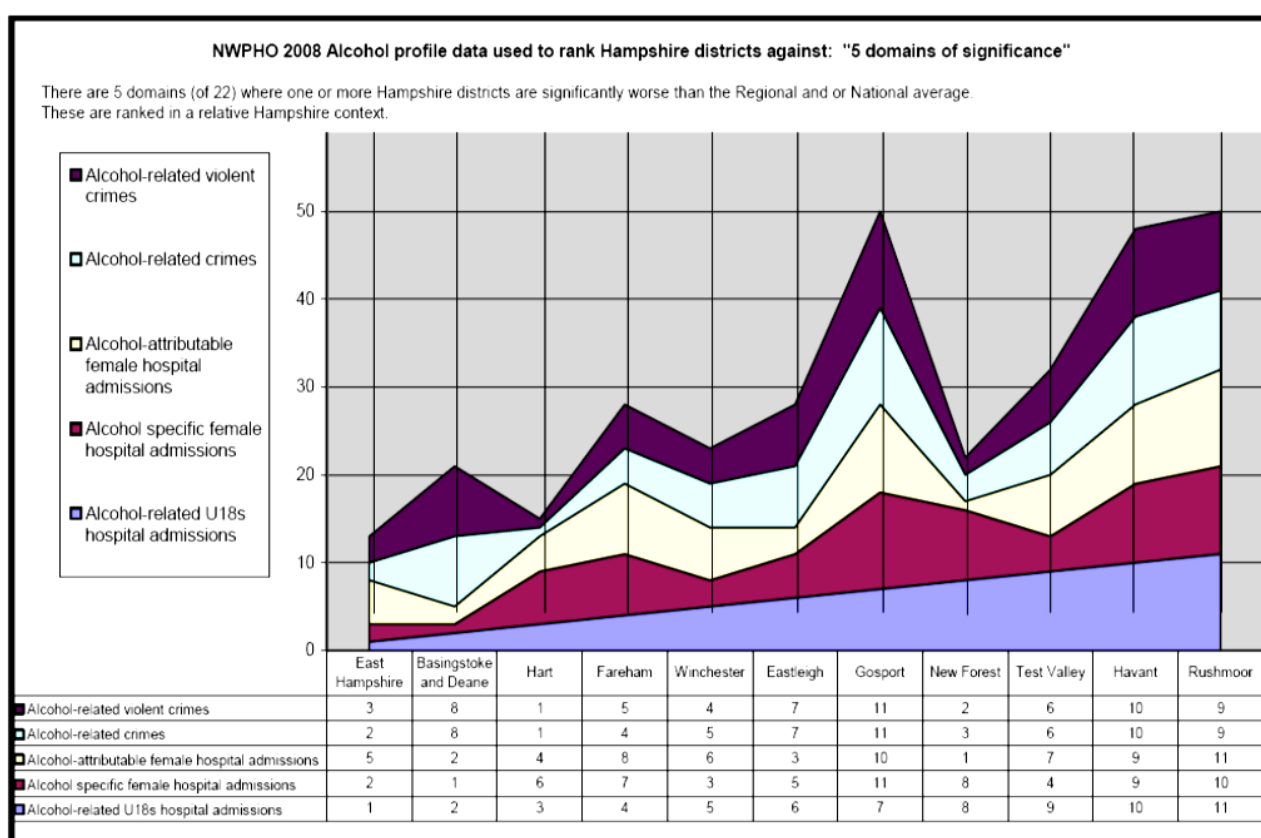


Table 3: Alcohol profile data for Hampshire districts (Bartle 2009:16)

Statistics for women’s arrests for being drunk and disorderly have increased throughout England and Wales, and my statistical search revealed that the figures for Hampshire had risen significantly between 2005 and 2007, with 24 women being arrested for being drunk and incapable in 2007 (a rise of 50% on previous years) and a further 183 women arrested for being drunk and disorderly (Campbell 2009; HC 2007).

I also found a website entitled chavtowns.co.uk, which is a blogging forum for members to add towns they consider ‘chavvy’. Atown was listed and described as follows, and as you will recognise this extract reproduces a lot of the classed talk around drinking which I have

discussed in the previous chapter. It also gives me a way to contextualise what girls from this town might need to negotiate when going out, and drinking within a sexualised culture.

“has pretensions of grandeur... It is primarily populated with people who never have, and never will, leave, probably because the limited gene pool doesn't allow it. On the other hand there are the brave, or ill informed, soles known as 'outsiders'. People who are sick of cities and want to be “closer to the countryside”, but still less than an hour from 'the big smoke' [London]....Born and bred locals are like characters from the League of Gentlemen; hideously inter-bred and festering in this backwater spittoon of modern, and not so modern civilisation. On the streets everyone is either 60+ or under 16, the latter invariably with at least one child in tow. They congregate, it would appear, in the high street, perhaps as the hideous concrete monstrosity that is the post office is near by, and provides many benefits, especially those they are not entitled too....The idea of people being close to idyllic countryside in this car park filled toilet bowl of North Hampshire is frankly ludicrous. Leave the relative safety of your vehicle and you will then be confronted by the 'locals', hoards of which you must go through to get the very few decent shops – two in fact. This being part of the main route for a legion of cider swilling, gel slicked oiks, the town is permeated by the stench of piss, puke and rotting kebabs” (*posted on: July 23, 2005 by admin*)

Responses to this posting include:

“Atown is a dump and it is full of pikey's and chavs” (*posted on: August 11, 2011*)

“You walk into a pub, it goes quiet and the inbreds just sit there and stare. Then completely refuse to talk to you for the rest of the night, because you 'aint one of dem'... I love a good walk down my street on a Sunday morning, I love seeing bottles of vodka, smirnoff, cider (OH WE IS CLASSAY!)” (*posted on: July 28, 2011*)

4.6 Procedure

In this section I explain how I recruited my participants, and how the study took shape from collecting the data through to my analysis.

4.6.1 Recruiting participants

As I explained earlier, this study is qualitative and small-scale in which my participants do not represent a 'generalised population', and their narratives are personal and localised. My sampling technique therefore was a mixture of 'opportunity/purposive' sampling and 'snowballing'. I started recruiting participants through my social contacts and voluntary work contacts (in my role as a youth worker). However, there is a difference between physical access and social access (Lee 1993:123), and I initially found, with some of the young

women, that although I had physical access, social access was challenging. I had to adopt a 'progressive entry' strategy, which involved my making 'gradually increased requests for more open access' (Johnson 1975:64). I did this by establishing a trusting relationship with several women from 'already formed' social groups, to whom I explained the aims and motives for my research, then, through this tentative introduction, I was 'allowed' access. In order to gain access and recruit more participants I used a 'snowballing' technique (Atkinson and Flint 2001), which involved my existing participants recommending or introducing other young women who were willing to join a friendship group discussion, and/or take part in an individual interview. All my female participants had to be at least eighteen years old in order to be able to give me their consent; had they been younger, I would have had to elicit their parents' consent. This would not only have made it more difficult to access potential participants, but the aim of the study was to explore women's understandings and experiences of 'nights out', and the legal age limit for buying alcohol in the UK is eighteen (HMSO 2003) .

Thirty-three women, between the ages of eighteen and twenty-four, participated in the study and it is their data that I analysed in this research.

4.6.2 Exploring women's experiences: out in the field

I wanted to get a sense of what it might be like to be a young woman in today's drinking cultures and this opportunity arose in the form of an invitation to join a group of eleven young women (aged 18 years) who were celebrating the end of their 'A' exams in Newquay¹⁵, Cornwall. 'Immersing' myself in the young women's social lives I used my observations, interactions and field notes in designing my semi-structured interview guide.

4.6.2.1 Newquay: speculative observation study

I carried out this speculative observation study in July 2008 for several reasons. As Van Maanen (1988) stresses, the belief of fieldworkers is in the personal experience of a *culture*. So without becoming over-involved and '*turning* native', I took up the young women's invitation to join them for four days on their 'end of exams blow-out', with the aim to observe and interact with them whilst making field-notes of their 'going out practices'. As a novice to fieldwork and lacking confidence, I felt piloting this qualitative approach to my research was important (Holloway 1997). Furthermore, I wanted to test the effectiveness of my preliminary

¹⁵ Newquay has become synonymous with post-exam celebrations

interview questions, and asking the young women for feedback meant I could identify any ambiguities or problems with these questions. As Bell (2005:147) points out, 'the purpose of a pilot exercise is to get the bugs out of the instrument so that...[participants] will experience no difficulties in completing it'. Thus I felt this observation would prove a sound reasoning for piloting questions that I potentially might have only one opportunity to ask participants in subsequent situations (such as individual interviews).

During these four days of observational study, I found all the participants very willing to talk to me about my research during the daytime; however, when it came to my observing their 'going out' at night, all the young women presented barriers [reasons for keeping me as the outsider and at a distance]. Lee (1993) outlined similar difficulties that a number of researchers experienced whereby participants feigned interest in the researcher's work but frequently find reasons for avoiding any form of engagement. Both Lindsay (2006) and Griffin et al. (2008) indicate that they were unable to conduct participant observation to the extent they initially envisaged due, in part, to the ways in which drinkers construct their public drinking space as private space, and which they are reluctant to allow 'others' inhabit. The key lesson I learnt from this pilot study was that "the pilot case...[is] mainly of value to the investigator" (Yin 1984:81), although it is still a valid part of the project in terms of which interview questions 'worked' and which didn't. Furthermore, it helped me establish a rapport with these girls, and gave me a stronger insight into what these girls did when they went out drinking and what they thought about their drinking practices.

Between late July 2008 and August 2009, I carried out my literature review and worked on refining my interview guide and recruiting my participants. I began my first phase of data collection in July 2009, joining a friendship group of young women on a 'night out', followed by my first round of individual interviews in August 2009.

4.6.2.2 'Nights out'

I was invited to join two of the study's friendship groups on 'nights out', which involved going to the home of one of the young women, observing and listening to their conversations whilst they got ready to go out, and then spending the evening with them in a number of night-time venues. This I considered a bit of a 'coup', since my earlier experiences of participant observation (in Newquay) had not been very successful in terms of generating data. I went out with the young women on eight occasions, either to pubs and wine bars in Atown, which

I refer to as 'pub nights', or going to bars and clubs – 'club nights' – in a larger town or city (see timeline, figure 32 p.110).

I was aware I needed to consider certain concerns in doing this form of fieldwork, for example, the *participant as observer* role emphasises participation as a means of building up a relationship of trust, but also involves the risk of over-identification with the subjects. Whereas, *observer as participant* observes more than participates, but this might cause superficiality of the observations (Duits 2008:64). Fortunately I already had a trusting relationship with some of the women in both friendship groups, and I moved between these two positions, trying to be as unobtrusive as possible (given that there was an age difference of some 27 years), and tailored my impression management (Goffman 1956/1990) to 'fit in' with the young women: being friendly, non-judgemental, using informal language, and suitably attired in either jeans and tunic top for Atown, or dress and high heels (ouch) for 'club nights'. Interestingly, as all the women knew I had become 'teetotal', they did not expect or encourage me to 'go native' and drink alcohol; instead they seemed more concerned that my being sober meant I was less safe, particularly when we were out on 'club nights', and took it in turns to hold my hand. Whilst I had been an excessive alcohol drinker in my youth, young women's 'binge' drinking was not considered as acceptable then as it 'appears' to be now.

Rather than make 'jotted' notes during these 'nights out', I made 'head-notes' and wrote up descriptive field notes when I got home. My intention was to write up notes that would 'tell it like it is'; giving the reader an understanding of what it is like to be a young woman going out in the NTE and how a particular group of young women make sense of their alcohol drinking.

In my 'head-notes' I used a number of Lindsay's (2006) headings, such as outside and inside environment, clothing and drinking styles of female customers, and my personal impressions of the venues we visited. Furthermore, unlike previous researchers (e.g., Lindsay 2006), the aim of my participation was simply to observe young people out drinking, not to recruit; this meant I was able to give my undivided attention to the women I was with. By coincidence, during these 'nights out', I was introduced to other young women and was able to observe their behaviour and semi-participate in 'girls' talk' around topics in my research.

4.6.2.3 Interviews

I started my first round of individual interviews in August 2009, followed by a second round, after further recruitment, starting in February 2010. I carried out twenty-three in-depth individual interviews in total, and the reasons for using interviews as a means of gathering data is as follows:

Rationale for Individual interviews

Whilst some researchers may demonstrate the shortcomings of qualitative methods in terms of their limited means of generalisation, since my aim was to explore young women's *subjective* views and *personal* understandings of gendered sexuality in drinking cultures, semi-structured, in-depth interviews was the most suitable method for producing data. The etymology of the word 'interview' is to see the other, and in qualitative inquiry it is about researchers entering the world of their participants and, 'at least for a time, seeing life through their eyes' (Rager 2005:24). Kelly, Burton and Regan (1994:34) argue that it is 'still the case that not just qualitative methods, but the in-depth face-to-face interview has become the paradigmatic 'feminist method''. However, I did not choose in-depth interviews simply because this method of data collection adheres to a feminist orthodoxy; rather, I conducted individual face-to-face interviews with twenty-three of my female participants, which were semi-structured as one way of establish rapport and a non-hierarchical or power relationship between the interviewee and myself. For example, in a structured interview, the interviewer assumes the right to ask questions, implicitly placing their interviewee in a position of subservience or inferiority. Furthermore, feminist researchers advocate establishing a high degree of reciprocity through using the face-to-face interview; in other words, the interview is a means of resolving the dilemmas I encounter as a feminist interviewing other women, and trying to answer some questions¹⁶ that an interviewee may ask me; as Lather (1986:263) suggests, by attending to reciprocity, research and researcher can work to empower the researched. The giving and taking, which naturally occurs in social interaction, can be enabled in interviews so that they become more like conversations; spontaneous exchanges which offer possibilities of flexibility and freedom for both interviewer and interviewee, and facilitates thick, rich data.

Semi-structured, open-ended interviews are like 'conversations with a purpose' (Holloway 1997:94), and unlike structured interviews, they allow flexibility. This flexibility meant I was able to leave questions out or ask them differently, condense or expand questions, or 'tailor' some using prompts according to the individual participant, and this elicited both similarities

¹⁶ Subject to ethical conditions

and differences in the young women's narratives. After conducting a pilot interview, I revised my interview guide (appendix A) which provided the basis for semi-structured 'conversations'.

My individual interview guide was semi-structured, with open questions, offering opportunities for clarification and discussion; this enabled me to follow unanticipated directions in conversation, and condense some questions into much shorter, broader ones as they worked more effectively in generating answers. Additionally, short open questions produced longer answers, reflecting more clearly the participant's own interests and concerns. Interviews took place at the participants' convenience, either in their own homes or at my house. I noted that two of the young women I interviewed who had just attained their 'A' levels [or equivalent] seemed more self-conscious and 'aware' of how I might react to their responses; their answers to questions were shorter and less elaborate compared to those of the young women with little or no experience of higher education. Additionally, the more highly educated women would pause before answering a question and would ask me to clarify anything they found ambiguous, whereas the lesser educated women were more likely to respond with stories as they occurred to them and dominate the conversation for longer periods. For me this felt like lived examples of Walkerdine, Lucey and Melody's (2001) study where they note the pressures of educational and personal achievement for middle class young women and a consequential need for self-management and transformation.

My interview guide began in asking participants' about their family backgrounds, their important relationships, their educational and occupational history and their current occupation. These details were elicited by asking the participants' to tell me 'a little bit about themselves', and using prompts to guide them through the process. And in order to reduce any suggestion of hierarchy between participants' and myself, I offered to talk briefly about myself as a means of 'breaking the ice', although this was rarely necessary. My interview guide was based around four main themes (drawing relevance from my literature review): alcohol drinking, femininities, identity construction and bodies.

All the interviews were audio-taped, using a digital Dictaphone and cassette recorder as backup in case one or other failed to operate. Responses to audio-taping the interviews were positive on all occasions and when I asked for participants' permission to record the interview (see consent form, appendix B) I made it clear that only I would be listening to these recordings, and all identifying information would be changed in the transcripts. Whilst I provided detailed information about my study at the beginning of each interview in order to obtain written consent, the idea of informed consent is problematic since you cannot be sure

of what people think they are consenting to (Ramazanoğlu and Holland 2002). I was acutely alert to the interests of my participants, and with Finch's (1993:173) words, that she has 'emerged from interviews with the feeling that my interviewees need to know how to protect themselves from people like me', resounding in my head, I took time, at the beginning of each interview, to establish some of the basic principles of my research. For example, I emphasised confidentiality, anonymity, voluntary participation and the young women's right to withdraw at any time, and encouraged them to view the interview as more akin to a 'guided conversation' (Rubin and Rubin 2005) by asking me questions during and following the interview.

4.6.2.4 'Friendship' groups

During the first and second rounds of individual interviews, I also conducted four naturally occurring friendship group discussions, with between three and five participants in each group. Again, I provide the rationale for using group discussions as follows:

Rationale for friendship group discussions

Friendship groups are not only useful for accessing the 'interactive nature of everyday sense-making' (Riley and Cahill 2005:265), but, as Wilkinson (2003:185) points out, they are "much more naturalistic in that they typically include a range of communicative processes, such as storytelling, joking, arguing, boasting, teasing, persuasion, challenge and disagreement". Whilst one-to-one interviews elicit a definitive individual view, there are a number of benefits to friendship/focus group discussions; the benefits appropriate to this study are that the interaction between the group members enables them to ask questions of each other, as well as to re-evaluate and reconsider their own understandings of their specific experiences (Kitzinger 1994), and encourages participation from people who are reluctant to be interviewed on their own (Kitzinger 1995a). As I chose friendship groups, the friendship between the women meant the group worked well together and trusted one another, and the group worked together in exploring solutions to particular issues and as a forum for change (Gibbs 1997). For example, in a group context it was easier for the participants to challenge views that they disagree with, or to reject others' assertions including the researcher's (Wilkinson 1999:71); this is something Griffin (1986:180) commented on in describing how her participants sometimes "discuss[ed] particular issues amongst themselves, without waiting for my next question", and this was certainly the case in all my friendship groups. Furthermore, previous research on young people and alcohol have highlighted how being in a group has an influence (Engineer et al. 2003; Szmigin et al.

2008). In this study, the women in each friendship group usually spend 'nights out' together and I was keen to explore how being part of a group influenced their understandings and experiences.

As with all research methods there are limitations with focus groups, and particularly friendships groups. Friendship groups can elicit group-think bias where there may be a tendency "towards conformity, in which some participants withhold things that they might say in private" (Morgan 1997:15). Furthermore as the point of group discussion is that participants talk to each other, the researcher has little control over the interaction other than keeping the participants focused on the topic. I also found organising and assembling the groups of young women far more difficult than individual interviews.

In carrying out these individual and friendship group interviews I was consciously aware of allowing a certain degree of autonomy for my participants, and although I had an interview guide, there was always the opportunity for each interviewee to lead the interview in a direction which was most important and relevant to her. Similarly I was open to disclosure if appropriate or if asked, because again, as Coates (1996:14) indicates 'I wanted to be explicit about my relationship to those who participated in my research, not to make that aspect of the research invisible'.

I had a group interview guide (see appendix C), which asked participants a number of questions on their socialising and drinking practices and also included a number of UK tabloid newspaper articles to prompt a discussion around media attention to young women's excessive alcohol consumption (see appendix D). However, as with the individual interviews, I remained flexible throughout the group sessions and preferred to let the young women steer the direction of the conversations; I only intervened to draw them back into the realm of my research topics if they digressed for too long. Several of my friendship group participants expressed how comfortable they felt in a 'group setting', particularly if they did not know me. This resonated with the words of one of Madriz's (2003:363) group participants: "I'd rather talk this way, with a group of women....When I'm alone with an interviewer, I feel intimidated, scared." As the friendship group setting gave some of my participants the opportunity to 'get to know' me, often they were more willing to take part in an individual interview. Some of these women, participating in subsequent individual interviews, elicited more depth and detail on topics that were only broadly discussed in the group sessions, and it also gave them the opportunity to talk about issues that they did not want to discuss in the group setting. A number of researchers studying young people's social drinking have used focus groups (e.g., Engineer et al. 2003; Griffin et al. 2009a; Sheehan and Ridge 2001; Young et al. 2005), and friendship groups (e.g., Armstrong,

Thunstrom, and Davey 2011; Brooks 2008; Goodman et al. 2011) as an effective way of generating rich and detailed data.

Each friendship group typically lasted two hours and one advantage of the relatively small size of each group was the ease at which I could recognise the women's voices during transcription. The small size and their existing friendship also meant that each of the women had an opportunity to talk, and this also often facilitated lively discussion amongst themselves, and with me (researcher).

Using friendship groups and interviews in this way demonstrates the cyclical nature of both my data collection and analysis process [see timeline, figure 32, p.110].

In addition to 'nights out', interviews and friendship group sessions, I participated in the young women's Facebook networking blogs.

4.6.2.5 'Facebook' participation and photographs

Founded in 2004, "Facebook is one of the most trafficked PHP site in the world" (Facebook 2010). Facebook PHP, or personal home page, is a free-access social networking website with over 845 million monthly active users at the end of December 2011 (Facebook 2012); to young people it is a means of communicating with friends and family, sharing experiences and social connections. All but one participant in this study were members of Facebook (I had 'friendships' with twenty-six participants), each had a personal profile and regularly used the website as a means of contacting their friends, making social arrangements and sharing photographs of their social experiences.

Rationale for using 'Facebook' and photographs

Using Facebook and photography, as alternative and additional methods of data collection, provided me with further opportunities to bring about collaboration with my participants; by looking at the still images, both physically and on Facebook, 'we' were able to discuss them, and these discussions become part of narrative exchange beyond that involved in the interview situations. In this sense, the photographs became data and data generators. Furthermore, a number of writers point to the importance of viewing experience and subjectivity as *situated* in specific locations (e.g., Majumdar 2011; Pini and Walkerdine 2011), and different kinds of spaces (locations/contexts) also make possible different versions of agency. Thus by taking a visual record, a photograph, of the young women at

the time when they were out drinking, it enables them to remember and reflect on their experience, and enables me to see the 'self' as a process and form that shifts according to context (see Reavey 2011).

I also use various methods of data collection in studying gender and power, because language is not all there is to know. Language is important because it constitutes identities, subjectivities and experiences, but, as Lather (1991:124) argues, following Foucault, language is particularly powerful in producing categories (e.g., the classification of genders), but since reality is heterogeneous, she does not want to 'collapse the real into language'. There is a critical difference between focusing on gender and power as effectively constituted by language, and seeing gender as partly constituted by language (Ramazanoğlu and Holland 2002:153). And the latter means 'investigating gender as simultaneously discursive, institutionalized, relational, experiential and material' (Ramazanoğlu and Holland 2002:154).

I originally created a Facebook account to make contact with my participants, but I also used 'snowballing' (Atkinson and Flint 2001) to approach new participants. Once interviews and friendship group discussions had taken place, and I had developed a rapport with the young women, Facebook became a means of blogging and staying in contact. Furthermore, with all my participants' consent I was able to view the photographs they took on 'nights out'. This could be described as a form of 'netnography' or online ethnography (Kozinets 2006); studies that have used netnography include online bulletin boards, e-mail, face-to-face interviews, and literature and media archive research as forms of data production (e.g., Langer and Beckman 2005). However, I did not use any of the blogs as part of my data analysis. I was more interested in visual-based research, and in particular the young women's photographs. Images provide powerful portrayals of individuals and their contexts such as the study of gender disparities, and visual methods of data collection are recognised in ethnography as a valuable resource (Pink 2007). Just as Foucault (2002:54) defines discourse as the "practices that systematically form the objects of which we speak", Reavey and Johnson (2008:297) summarise that this "might as well include cities, non-verbal behaviour, films, photographs....as well as the written and spoken word". As Pink (2007:1-2) points out,

'theoretical approaches to subjectivity, experience, knowledge and representation...and an emphasis on interdisciplinarity invited exciting new possibilities for the use of photographic technologies and images in ethnography'

Harper (2003:243) also points out that the use of photography is not so much about claiming 'this is what is', but creates a dialogue around the competing and complementary meanings of images. Rose (2005:69) encourages a critical approach to visual imagery, suggesting that images are 'important not simply because, for some people in some places, they are pervasive, but because they have effects'. This is particularly relevant in relation to the construction of social differentiation, for example, different identities and different subject positions are reiterated in highly complex ways by visual images.

However, the use of visual methods can be problematic, and scholarly resistance towards visual data is fuelled by questions of ethics, validity, reliability, rigor, moral conduct, and trustworthiness (Harper 2003; Pink 2007). In order to answer the validity and reliability of photographs in this research, I asked these basic questions to optimise its appropriate use:

Does it enhance the research study? And,

Does it add value?

Certainly I might answer that any strategy that aids the collection and analysis of data without violating ethical considerations is relevant in qualitative studies, but to answer the questions directly, the photographs provide insights of young women's experiences of events to which I was not present, to events where capturing accurate field notes was difficult during observation, and helps to recall observations and experiences in a manner that textual representation could not replicate. The purpose of feminist ethnographic inquiry is to bring an awareness of a number of issues, including culture and equality, from these young women's perspectives to the fore. Photographs and supported textual descriptions enhance this rationale, and also because it uses a different form of medium it opens up possibilities for different forms of 'knowing' which my readers would not get from just reading the transcripts.

The ethical considerations regarding the use of photographs will be discussed in section 4.8.

4.7 Data analysis

4.7.1 Managing the data and data analysis

Each of the tape-recorded interviews and friendship group discussions were transcribed verbatim, using an adaptation of the transcription conventions developed by Jefferson (1984, 2004) (see appendix N). This approach to transcribing involves minimal ‘cleaning up’ of the data with the inclusion of significant pauses, self-corrections, emphasis, and the use of ungrammatical punctuation to capture rhythm and laughter. Whilst transcribing can be a laborious and time-consuming task, in carrying out this process myself, it necessitates my immersion in the data which, subsequently, results in a higher level of familiarity and engagement in its analysis at a much earlier stage (Minichiello et al. 1995). And as O’Reilly (2005:153) points out, by doing the transcription yourself, you start to identify themes and make connections, and as I became familiar with the texts, I knew ‘later exactly where to find the bit I was looking for’.

The study draws on poststructuralist theories to argue that people make sense of themselves by drawing on the multiple, and inevitably contradictory, discourses that are available to them (Hollway 1998; Weedon 1997). For example, Foucault (2002:54) talks of discourses as ‘practices that systematically form the objects of which they speak’, and Gavey (1989) highlights how discourses are specific to particular groups, cultures, and historical periods and are thus always changing. These discourses, in turn, inform people of what they can do and say.

4.7.2 Discourse analysis

According to Speer (2005:6) ‘discourse analysis is a collective term for a diverse body of work spanning a range of disciplines’, and feminist applications of discourse analysis are equally diverse (Wilkinson and Kitzinger 1995). It was in the 1980s with the ‘turn to language’, that discourse research gained a ‘serious foothold’, and the publication of Potter and Wetherell’s (1987) *Discourse and Social Psychology: Beyond Attitudes and Behaviour* played an important part in this development (Willig 2008:93). Wetherell (2001:381) highlights how diverse discourse research has become, with many different possible models available including conversation analysis (CA), Foucauldian research, critical discourse analysis (CDA), and discursive psychology. Rather than explore the different variants of discourse analysis here, I will focus on Foucauldian versions of discourse analysis which, unlike discursive psychology which is primarily concerned with interpersonal communication,

links subjectivity, culture and materiality, and encourages an approach in which participants' talk is analysed in relation to the social context in which it is produced. Furthermore, as Willig (2003:171) explains, Foucauldian discourse analysis (FDA) is also concerned with the role of discourse in wider social processes of legitimation and power. Therefore, my analysis pays attention to dominant discourses that privilege versions of social reality and possible counter-discourses emerging.

During the analysis stage, I worked with the transcriptions, but also repeatedly went back to listen to different sections of the recordings. I had defined three areas of analysis beforehand, which I particularly wanted to look for: *gender*, *alcohol consumption*, and *claiming space* (*class* emerged as a further area during analysis), since Griffin (2005:11) argues that contemporary femininity offers little or no space from which to drink alcohol; and in the initial stages of FDA that I examined the transcripts to see if and how these three 'objects' were constructed.

4.7.3 Foucauldian discourse analysis (FDA)

In keeping with a poststructuralist approach, I used a Foucauldian-inspired discourse analysis in six stages, described by Willig (2003, 2008). The Foucauldian version of discourse analysis is concerned with language and language use; however, it is primarily concerned with interpersonal communication and asks questions about the relationship between discourse and how people think or feel (subjectivity), what they may do (practices) and the material conditions within which peoples' experiences take place (Willig 2008:113). I focus on gaining an understanding of the ways in which young women use language to construct and make-sense of their femininities and drinking practices in the culture of intoxication; exploring which discourses they draw on, combine, and resist in taking up and investing in particular subject positions. And, in this respect, I describe the six stages of FDA as follows:

1. *Discursive constructions* – identifying the different ways in which the discursive objects (that I am focusing on) are constructed in the text, e.g.: *drinking and drunkenness, being female, claiming space*.
2. *Discourses* – locate the various (different) constructions of the objects within wider discourses (theory and macro-level discourses), e.g.: *being female in drinking spaces*

3. *Action orientation* – discourse functionality; consider what is being gained from constructing the object in a particular way, and how it relates to other constructions produced within wider discourses
4. *Positionings* – the subject positions¹⁷ offered within these various discourses; positions made available within discourses (as well as place others within) from which to speak and act
5. *Practice* – the ways in which discursive constructions and subject positions within them open up or close down opportunities for action. Non-verbal practices can, and do, form part of discourses, limiting what can be said and done, e.g.: *positions the young women drinkers can legitimately practice*
6. *Subjectivity* – the relationship between discourse (available ways-of-seeing the world) and subjectivity (certain ways-of-being in the world). Thus what can be felt, thought and experienced from within a particular subject position, e.g.: *the implications in taking up certain positions on the young women's subjectivity and the consequences of taking up particular positions on their subjective experience*

With these final stages of analysis I explored the subject positions my female participants could legitimately practice within the 'culture of intoxication', and what the possible consequences were, in taking up these positions, for their subjectivity.

Below I detail a step-by-step example, using a section of text transcribed from my interview with 'Terry' (participant), to illustrate more closely the different stages of analysis:

Terry: *"I think it's important to drink (.) it's just the fact that it's almost habit, because everyone just does it (.) it's just routine, that's what everyone sort've does [later in the interview] It's different for a guy though (.) he hasn't got a reputation (.) if he gets drunk, so drunk, like can't even stand up and strips off in the street everyone'll still love him, if a girl was to do that it would be quite different (.) so there is kind've like no in-between (.) you do have to care, you have to know you're limits (.) you can still enjoy yourself and occasionally let that slip when you get too drunk (.) but there is a lot more freedom for males to do it than for females because you've got (.) reputation, self respect [5] and you have to look sexy and feminine."*

¹⁷ In Davies and Harré's (1990:62) words, 'a subject position is a possibility in known forms of talk; position is what is created in and through talk as the speakers and hearers take themselves up as persons. This way of thinking explains discontinuities in the production of self with reference to the fact of multiple and contradictory discursive practices and the interpretations of those practices that can be brought into being by speakers and hearers as they engage in conversations'.

1. Discursive constructions

My concern here is how the discursive object is constructed through language. As outlined earlier, my three objects of analysis, gender, femininities and claiming space within drinking cultures, and the ways in which power and resistance operate within talk, are all explicitly or implicitly constructed in the above text. Firstly, alcohol drinking is constructed as prescriptive, as something '*everyone just does*' as part of a '*routine*', and it is an important part of 'going out' in the culture of intoxication. Secondly, gender is constructed as a *doing* through difference as exemplified in Terry's narrative, performed through certain scripts, and again, scripts which are tightly prescriptive; both men and women can take part in this drinking culture, however women are limited by certain bodily functions ensuring that they perform a way of 'doing woman' that is intelligibly feminine. At this stage, *claiming space* is implicitly articulated – '*you can still enjoy yourself and occasionally let it slip when you get too drunk*', but within this *space* the social-historic double standard still exists in restricting young women's freedom with the threat of losing their reputation as 'good' women (see next stage).

2. Discourses

In this second stage I looked at the wider discourses with which the constructions resonate. Whilst the discourse of gender is actively performed – the young women are actively taking part in re-enacting current norms of drinking in public – this sits alongside the historical construction of women drinkers as disreputable and unrespectable. This creates a dilemma, and counter-discourses of '*knowing you're limits*' and '*reputation*' emerge, together with the idea of a powerful obligation to '*look sexy and feminine*'.

3. Action orientation

This third stage focuses on the functionality of the young woman's talk. Although 'Terry' emphasises that '*everyone*' drinks, she also uses gender discourse to highlight the different gendered constructions of drinking – like a man, or, like a woman – with no space for anything '*in-between*'. The discourses 'Terry' uses, such as '*have to care*' and '*know you're limits*', function in constraining young women's drinking behaviour, since any *girl* behaving like a man would be judged as *quite different*, and constructed as 'Other'.

4. Positionings

The fourth stage asks what subject positions these constructions offer. This particular text depicts one singular desir(ed)able and respectable drinking position available to young women: a 'sexy feminine', and relatively sober one. And this text functions in exemplifying how femininity is a contradictory and dilemmatic space and one that has become increasingly difficult to occupy (Griffin et al. 2012), yet young women do find ways of occupying this space in which to drink from: *you can still enjoy yourself*

5. Practice

This stage involves looking at what possibilities for action are mapped by these constructions; what can be said and done by the subjects positioned within them? 'Terry's narrative does highlight the lack of freedom to choose between femininities as a female drinker, and she emphasises how *freedom* is gendered in the culture of intoxication – '*there is a lot more freedom for males to do it*'. Women's drinking practices are constrained by the requirements to 'look' feminine, which can also restrict their mobility, and (self) imposed limits on alcohol consumption.

6. Subjectivity

This stage in the analysis is, according to Willig (2008:122), the most speculative. Since there is no necessary direct relationship between language and various mental states, I can only describe what *can* be felt, thought and experienced from within various subject positions. It is not a matter of analysing if 'Terry' 'actually' feels this way, but of what her particular talk produces. 'Terry' talks of the freedom men have when out getting drunk and no matter how outrageous their behaviour may be (stripping off in the street) '*everyone'll still love him*'. So whilst there is a space to enjoy drinking – '*you can still enjoy yourself*' – this construction is accompanied by a sense of scrutiny and surveillance. Constantly under scrutiny (the critical gaze) to produce a femininity that is not only desirable (sexy), but at the same time, respectable, surrounds the possibilities of freedom and pleasure, and reveals the tightrope balancing act women must maintain in the UK's 'culture of intoxication'.

4.7.4 Using and interpreting visual images and observational field-notes

Whilst psychological research has used visual images and interpreted them in a variety of ways, visual methodologies have been predominantly overlooked by qualitative researchers and one of the key reasons for this is the claim that visual data is more ambiguous or polysemic than words (Frith et al. 2005:187); and this raises questions regarding the validity of the researcher's interpretation of visual material, as the interpretation cannot always be exactly matched to the participant's verbal account (Lynn and Lea 2005a). However, as I discussed earlier, visual texts and phenomena, along with lexical ones, are discursive constructions; and the visual can be 'worked up and presented as mere reflections of reality just as descriptions can' (Edwards 1997:221). The insights that visual methodologies provide in respect of text/context relationships (as exemplified in my analysis), increase our understanding of the social world and of the research processes we use to make sense of it (Lynn and Lea 2005b:223). I use my field-notes, and in particular, my photographs of participants to enable my 'audience to widen their experience, understanding and representation of the topic of interest' (Frith et al. 2005:189); and using photographs as part of my analysis, I am acknowledging the fundamental part the 'aesthetic' plays in speaking to 'who we are' (Reavey and Johnson 2008). Working with my participants in selecting photographs for analysis, enabled me to capture aspects of their participation in 'going out' socialising and drinking. Furthermore, using photographs alongside the young women's narratives, I was also able to capture aesthetic aspects of their embodied drinking experiences; for example, the photographs depict the significance of aesthetic dress in the creation and maintenance of gendered bodies and identities (Adkins 2002) in this context, and this highlights the importance of 'visual languages' in stitching together the socio-cultural fabric of social-psychological experiences and embodies ways of being (Banks 2003). I also use some photographs to 'support' aspects of my analysis of the young women's narratives; for example, I interpret Velma's 'self-portrait', on the front cover of this thesis, as portraying a private and public self:



Figure 35: 'Velma' (participant)

She has deliberately 'made-up' one side of her face to show me how she 'must' appear when she goes out socialising, and on the 'other' side of her face she wears no make-up but tells me she *'couldn't be seen like that out in public'*.

4.7.5 Critique of analysis

I specifically chose FDA for its evaluation of selfhood, subjectivity and power; engaging the critical strand of social constructionist psychology which is interested in how language is implicated in power relations, but is also concerned more broadly with the ways in which discourses produce subjectivity (Burr 2003:150). Whilst FDA is applied to spoken or written texts of all kinds, and also any material with symbolic content, such as film, photographs and clothes, Willig (2008:123) suggests that addressing issues such as subjectivity, ideology and power raises a number of theoretical questions. These include, for example, to what extent subjectivity can be conceived upon the basis of discourse alone (Burr 2003:104-125). There are limits to all approaches, however, I believe a feminist poststructuralist framework which draws on Foucault's conceptions of discourse and power (Weedon 1997) and uses FDA enables me to focus on both the micro and macro context, and the multiple subjectivities of those involved in my research. It also enables a critical, reflexive analysis of taken-for-

granted assumptions about important feminist concepts such as 'empowerment' and 'agency'.

4.8 Ethical Considerations

Ethical considerations were of paramount importance in the design of this research study, particularly in terms of considering the potential benefits and harms to the participants and the researcher. An intended benefit for my participants was the opportunity to express their views on a topic in which female participation is often scrutinised and criticised, and their voices overlooked; participant feedback during and after the friendship group discussions, in particular, did indicate that this opportunity was welcomed. Prior to approaching potential research participants or conducting fieldwork, my study design was submitted to the Psychology Department Ethics Committee at the University of Bath, Bath, Somerset for ethical approval; this was granted in full, number 08-543 (see appendix G).

A commitment to conduct this research in an ethical manner was my primary concern throughout the process. Feminists have been particularly conscious of the potentially exploitative nature of research, particularly in the relationship between the researcher and the researched; for example, McRobbie (1991b:126) suggests that the interaction between the two is 'a relationship paralleling in its unequal power that of social worker and client, or teacher and pupil'. Any possibility of exploiting or patronising the participants in any study should be avoided at all costs and feminist research continually strives to treat 'subjects' with respect and equality. However, at the same time, my shared gender with the participants should not mislead me into a false notion of 'oneness'. As McRobbie (1991b:128) points out, 'whilst feminism ensures thoughtfulness, sensitivity and sisterhood, it cannot bind all women together purely on the grounds of gender'; this would be misleading and problematic.

In practice and as a starting point, I took particular care in ensuring that all my participants were informed, both verbally and in writing, of the nature and purpose of my study.¹⁸ They were also given the opportunity to ask questions prior to, during, and after their participation in the study. All participants were asked to give their written consent¹⁹ to take part on the understanding that this would not infringe on their right to withdraw at any time during the study, and without any obligation to give reasons for their withdrawal. As this study was viewed as a 'collaborative' process between myself (as researcher) and the young women

¹⁸ Appendices B & E, page 1

¹⁹ Appendices B & E, page 2

[as participants], 'consent' was similarly viewed as an ongoing agreement, and one that was actively negotiated throughout the research process²⁰.

Whilst this project was not directly examining topics of a sensitive nature, there were occasions during the process that 'sensitive' issues arose. Defining what I mean by 'sensitive', I prefer Lee's (1993:4) explanation that it is 'research which potentially poses a substantial threat to those who are or have been involved in it'; this includes two areas: '*intrusive threat*', which deals with areas that are 'private, stressful or sacred' (Lee 1993:4), for example sexual practices, and '*threat of sanction*', which relates to studies of deviance and involves the possibility that the research may reveal information that is stigmatizing or incriminating in some way. Some areas of personal life that researchers are interested in investigating are not so much private as emotional, and taking part can be a stressful experience for both the researcher and the researched; this again would be considered sensitive (Dickson-Swift, James, and Liamputtong 2008). Lee (1993) acknowledges that feminist researchers do tend to share commitment to certain ways of researching women and their positions in society. I encountered several participants who, during the course of the interview, and later correspondence by email, chose to talk at length about sensitive aspects of their private lives. In the case of one young woman, I do think that she was lonely and vulnerable and found it helpful to talk, in the conditions of confidentiality, with a 'friendly stranger' whose life is situated at some distance from her own (Cotterill 1992:596). I was not in a position to offer any form of counselling to any of the young women, but listened or made suggestions as to where they could seek advice. These particular participants said they felt better for talking to me, and I continue to regularly contact them as a means of follow-up and checking on their progress. Furthermore, all participants were given an information sheet detailing sources of support in relation to a range of issues as a matter of course.²¹

Confidentiality and anonymity were guaranteed to participants during data collection, data analysis, writing up and dissemination of findings. In any reports produced as a result of this study, participants have been anonymised through the use of pseudonyms and the removal of any detail which allows participants to be identified. At all times during the research process, data was either stored on the researcher's personal password-protected computer or in a locked cabinet at the researcher's home. Data collected during the study was stored

²⁰ In using qualitative research methods (semi-structured interviews and friendship groups) means it was anticipated that new themes and issues for further discussion would emerge as the interview/group progressed. It was therefore impossible to predict all the exact topics for discussion prior to the start of each interview/group. This clearly has implications for what is meant by informed consent (Holloway 1997)

²¹ see appendix F

in compliance with the Data Protection Act (HMSO 1998), and upon final completion, data will be destroyed.

4.8.1 Pseudonyms

Wishing to invoke a sense of autonomy and agency in the young women, and as a means of thinking about themselves as embedded in a drinking culture, I asked each participant to choose a pseudonym. As ethical consideration demands anonymity and many of the women knew, or knew of, other participants, pseudonyms met this criteria, and most of the women enjoyed the idea of choosing an interviewee 'persona'. The choice of pseudonyms is interesting in its own right; the women were asked to say why they chose particular names, and, for example, the women chose names of characters from their favourite films, nicknames they were called when out drinking and perhaps 'idealised' names such as 'Posh' (celebrity Victoria Beckham's stage name as a member of the British pop girl group 'Spice Girls').

4.8.2 Ethical Issues

4.8.2.1 Friendship groups and confidentiality

As data was collected in a group setting on four occasions (rather than in individual interviews), I was aware of the potential risk to the confidentiality of information by one of the participants' sharing the issues discussed with those 'outside' of the friendship group. Whilst the women in each group already had an established friendship with all the members of their group, I took the precaution of emphasising at the beginning and end of each discussion session that participants should respect each other's privacy and anonymity. Once outside the group setting, they should not reveal their identities or pseudonyms of other participants nor indicate who made specific comments during the discussion.

4.8.2.2 Visual data collection (photographs)

Multiple fields have used images for different purposes (i.e., anthropology, sociology and psychology), and most agree on a general code of conduct that includes ethics and moral responsibilities of the researcher such as 'informed consent, opposition to deception, privacy and confidentiality, and accuracy' (Edgar 2004:101-02). Critics have, however, challenged the bias, purpose and analysis of visual data, much as they have textual representation. Edgar (2004:102) argues that any data collection method can be intrusive; 'even a simple

interview can suddenly trigger a sensitive area'. Guided by Wiles et al. (2008) and Pink's (2007:53) recommendations, I sought the permission of each individual participant to use a selection of photographs which they had posted of themselves on the social networking site Facebook, in 'going out' contexts, as well as seeking their consent to be photographed. I put a specific question on the consent form and verbally clarified the purpose for seeking their permission to use such images in my research. However, I did not perceive this as a license then to use the images in unrestricted ways. Ethical questions were considered continually during the process of representation; sensitivity to how the young women might experience anxiety or stress in different ethnographic contexts was avoided at all costs. Using the two approaches of collaborative agreement and joint ownership enabled the young women to maintain some degree of control over which photographs were actually used in the research.

Questions of harm to individuals become pressing when it comes to publication, and with photography this is especially important since it is relatively impossible to preserve anonymity of people and places (Pink 2007:56). I took the precaution, with most of the photographs presented in this paper, of obscuring the young women's identities by increasing the pixilation of facial features in order to blur them (Wiles et al. 2008:23). However, there were occasions when obscuring faces would 'affect the reader's ability to make sense of the visual data' as faces were necessary in getting a sense of how the young women were presenting particular aspects of themselves' (Wiles et al. 2008:23). Again, I sought a collaborative approach and the idea that we were 'creating something together' in redressing the balance of inequality and power between the women and myself; through negotiation and collaboration the photographs became part of the challenge to existing power structures and a means of empowerment for these individuals.

4.9 Reflexive account and summary

For the most part, adopting a feminist poststructuralist methodological approach provided a positive framework for the design and conduct of this study. Nonetheless, adopting a feminist ethos and framework was not without its challenges, and it is important to acknowledge and consider my own role within the analytical process. It has been argued that, from a feminist perspective, women, as interviewers and interviewees, 'share a subordinate structural position by virtue of their gender' (Finch 1993:170), which can facilitate shared identification and rapport. Being female, I shared the most obvious similarity with my female participants. Echoing the experiences of other feminist researchers in interviewing women (Finch 1993; Oakley 1981), my participants' responses and feedback

did suggest that they were able to 'identify' with me on this basis, and felt comfortable about disclosing particular information that they may not have done with a male researcher.

However, I needed to bear in mind that interviewing my female participants was not a 'one-size-fits-all' type of activity (Reinharz and Chase 2003:74); that there were aspects of their lives that were different to mine and they may have preconceived ideas about the research and my role in it. The most common dissimilarity between my participants and myself was age; on average, I was twenty-seven years older than my research participants, however, it is difficult to ascertain whether this disparity inhibited my participants' responses in any way. Most of my participants seemed to either assume I had some knowledge of their drinking cultures (e.g., bars and clubs where they drank and socialised and with whom) or were willing to explain anything they said that I did not understand or was not familiar with. I was also aware that no matter how hard I tried to minimise any power imbalances in the research process, our shared gender alone would not necessarily equate to a shared view of the world; and the research process was likely to be influenced by other factors such as class.

Despite the difference between my own experience as a middle-class woman (married to a working-class man), and most of my participants as working-class, I did not feel this inhibited their self-expression or hinder our forming reciprocal relationships. As a sociable and curious individual (LeCompte and Schensul 2010), I found it easy to connect with my participants, however, I never tried to 'act' their age. In all aspects of the research process I approached the young women respectfully and with interest, and acknowledged that their views on life might not necessarily be in keeping with my own personal values. For example, during some of our interviews and group discussions, some of the young women expressed their views about what they saw as 'appropriate' behaviour for women in 'going out' socialising; referring to some of my participants, who wore revealing clothing, as 'sluts' who were 'asking for it' particularly if they drank too much. I had already anticipated this type of dilemma, and felt it appropriate to explore why they held such views, but not to criticise my participants' perspectives or silence them in any way. My reflexivity in this regard was also important when it came to analysing and selecting the data presented in this thesis. As the aim of this study is to provide an understanding of how a particular group of young women constitute forms of femininity and experience their positioning within the culture of intoxication, my focus is on gender, femininity and gendered power relations (which includes class). Whilst it is the feminist principle to 'allow women's voices to be heard' which might raise questions since some of these 'voices' might be seen as intentionally or unintentionally discriminating against other women, I want to present as unbiased account of these women's voices as possible. Thus, as Ramazanoğlu and Holland (2002:148) describe, I 'have to come to terms with the discomforts of producing

knowledge of how women exercise power, promote injustice, collude in their own subordination, or benefit from the subordination of 'others'.

Arguably, the matter of interpretation is where the power of the researcher is most acute (Smith 1999), and I am aware that deciding what I decide to include, exclude, or identify as discourses carry theoretical, ethical and political implications (Ramazanoğlu and Holland 2002:161). I also acknowledge that my interpretation of participants' experiences may differ from their own interpretations and, indeed, the interpretations of other researchers. I do emphasise, however, that I have tried to make the process of interpreting my data as explicit as possible, and as this is an iterative and reflexive process, my analysis and findings are contingent and incomplete (since there is no point at which the possibility of competing interpretations and analysis stops).

Nonetheless, through repeatedly reading and re-reading my participants' narratives, I identified three broad main themes: 'alcohol as prescriptive', 'alcohol as enabler', and 'alcohol as provocateur'. And, in interrogating the data for similarities and differences in the ways my participants talk around these themes; my analysis produced a number of patterns of discourse within each theme. I present my analysis together with selected extracts of data in the following three chapters which cover the three themes outlined above.

PART 2 – The study analysis

Chapter Five: *Alcohol as Prescriptive: negotiating expectations of femininity and intoxication*

5.1 Introduction

In the context of a wide range of social, political and economic changes, together with the goals achieved by feminism, new possibilities for young women have been created in the UK. Combined with new ideologies about individual responsibility and choices, young women are now encouraged to see themselves, and be seen, as enjoying new freedoms and opportunities – to believe they ‘can do anything’ and ‘are powerful’ (Harris 2004b:8). There has been an upward trend in the proportion of women in employment, rising from 53% in 1971 to 66% in the first quarter of 2011 (Spence 2011); and young women are surrounded by images of independent glamorous consumer lifestyles that suggest they should be enjoying these kinds of lives too and that this is what it means to be successful (Harris 2004b). This new visibility, overtly apparent in post-feminist discourses such as ‘girl-power’, has driven entrepreneurial ideas of self-expression through fashion and new attitudes toward femininity. However, this (neo-liberal) ‘do-it-yourself’ (DIY) approach to cultural production (Gonick 2007:311) has made it very difficult for many young women to avoid or refute the new processes of female individualisation which demand meticulous attention to detail and self-monitoring of the female body. The authoritative voice of consumer culture, and more specifically the beauty and fashion industries, intimately cajole and encourage young women to embark on a regime of self-perfectibility (McRobbie 2009); yet the images they project are arguably impossible for many young women to attain, in part because they require hard work, skills, time and money, but also because they are often riddled with social and classed inequalities.

The transparency of this new visibility of public femininity is very obvious in drinking cultures and to date there is a popular obsession, by the UK media, in portraying women excessive alcohol drinkers as vulnerable and at risk. Not only are these women drinking heavily in public, a historically perceived act of deviance by society (Sheehan and Ridge 2001), but their feminine attire has given rise to concern – ‘the work-hard play-hard so-called ‘ladette’, with clothes askew, stumbling round city centres at night, the doubly deviant figure of drunkenness in a dress’ (Measham and Østergaard 2009:417). Yet little is said about these women, beyond labelling them ‘ladettes’. Griffin (2005) suggests that women today do not

want to 'drink like a girl', which entails being respectable, restrained and 'therefore rather boring', yet they do not want to 'drink like a lad', with its connotations of masculinity, either, so what spaces, if any, does contemporary femininity offer from which to drink? My analysis explores how a particular group of young women in drinking cultures negotiate current discourses surrounding extreme alcohol consumption. It explores their participation in a 'culture of intoxication' (Measham and Brain 2005), in a setting where respectability and sexual propriety may be expected of them, yet where the pressures of hyper-femininity and heterosexuality of modern womanhood may also be intensely felt.

Part two of the thesis is divided into three chapters, each exploring a central theme emerging from my data analysis. This chapter examines my participants' construction of extreme alcohol drinking and how difficult it is for them, as young women, to drink alcohol yet it is a prescriptive part of going out. Chapter six examines women's construction and reproduction of post-femininities and how difficult it is to be a young woman, yet something alcohol helps enable; and then, in chapter seven, I explore why women, despite finding it hard to drink alcohol in what is deemed an 'acceptable' and 'appropriate' way, and hard to be a woman in today's society, still participate in the 'culture of intoxication'. The theme of this chapter is 'pleasure and power', in which I show how the young women 'do' excessive drinking because, for them, it is pleasurable and empowering (but at a price).

In this chapter, my participants talk about their excessive alcohol consumption as a normal and expected part of going out socialising in the NTE.

5.2 (Self) regulatory drinking-'it's just routine'

Drinking alcohol was constructed as a routine part of 'going out' in a social context. Echoing analysis of the UK's 'culture of intoxication' (Measham and Brain 2005) in which drinking to the extent that getting drunk was often the outcome (Lyons, Dalton, and Hoy 2006), my participants frequently talked about alcohol consumption as '*just something everyone does*':

Extract – Terry: *every night out when I do go out (.) everyone is drinking (1) I think everyone that's out on a 'student night' really is drinking (1) it is important we have to drink, you're gonna have fun↓ (1) the fact that my friend was bored after an hour for not drinking and said she was gonna go home kind've (.) yeh. I think that most people do drink or they go home (1) yeh I think it is important for a girl to go out and drink (1) when you go out in the evening you feel like (.) yeh I'm going out to*

drink (.) it's almost habit, because everyone does drink (.) it's just routine, that's what everyone sort've does

Terry talks about drinking whenever she is out as participating in a normative activity 'everyone is drinking' as if she does not really question whether she wants to drink alcohol on these occasions, rather it's an activity that, as she says at the end of this extract, is *just routine*. The word 'just' is used frequently by all the young women in this study. In describing their drinking as '*just*' something they do, the young women do not need to account any further for their consumption; '*just*' simply provides a gloss summing up of drinking as a normalised activity when going out (Lee 1987).

Terry also places emphasis – *it's important* – on being female and drinking, which on the one hand she associates (during the interview) with women's rights and gender equality, but she also associates having to drink with having fun. Suggesting that an evening out would not be enjoyable or fun if she did not drink, Terry justifies this with the example of her non-drinking friend who got bored very quickly and went home, adding that the only choices for most people was to drink or go home. It would seem that *not* drinking on these occasions would be impossible, and this idea is reinforced in Tracey's narrative:

Extract – Tracey: *Every Thursday I go to XXXX 'student night' (.) it involves a lot of drinking, a lot of shots (3) alcohol just comes with it on a Thursday for me, sometimes I really really need to just drink (.) um (.) and go dance and have fun. I mean it's not about the gettin' wasted (2) it's just about making the night that little bit better*

Tracey talks of *really, really* needing to *just drink* which again emphasises the prescriptive part alcohol plays in a night out. Describing excessive drinking as part of her routine (*every Thursday*), Tracey talks about alcohol not so much as a choice, but something she 'really' needs to do. Tracey talks about alcohol as '*just*' something that comes with these nights out (Thursdays), and, perhaps orienting to the potential judgement from her interviewer she then downplays her claims, saying 'going out' is '*not about the getting' wasted*' (drinking to get drunk), it just makes her evening out '*that little bit better*'.

Both women thus talk about expecting to drink and perhaps 'needing' alcohol, while also playing down this as *just* something they do. But they're not alone in saying they need a drink:

Extract – Esmee: *such a psychological thing to say 'I need a glass of wine' (4) but I do sometimes*

In the interview Esmee justifies her use of the word 'need' by adding that she only needs alcohol when she has had 'a really crap day at work'. However later in the interview, we can see a shift from constructing it as a psychological need to a social prescriptive need, when Esmee refers to this 'need' as something she *has* to do but this time she says it is because the alcohol is cheap:

Extract – Esmee: *as soon as you go out you've got to have a promotional shot↓ (.) I don't know why and it's always something really disgusting and you don't like it, but you still do it*

There is, it seems, little talk of drinking being something the women in this study do because they like alcohol. Rather, they talk about drinking as routine and prescriptive, and something they are expected to do. Esmee uses words such as 'got to have' as though drinking is a compulsory part of 'going out'. There is also a pronoun shift in Esmee's talk; she begins using the first person singular, 'I do', but then moves to the second person, 'you've got to'; 'you still do it' which again suggests this behaviour is generalised.

Extract – Tracey: *alcohol just comes with it (3) it's just about making the night*

Extract – Amelie: *I just got, I wasn't intending to get that drunk (.) and I just got completely off my face*

Extract – Sienna: *you just find yourself sitting and like 'Let's do shots'*

Emphasised by the repetition of 'just', as exemplified above, the young women are able to talk about drinking in a light-hearted, generalised way, and whilst the amount they consume exceeds the Government's recommended daily limits, their ability to normalise their drunkenness subtly deflects any negative implications. Furthermore, in using words such as 'just' and 'got to' the young women are able to avoid responsibility for their actions; and constructing alcohol drinking as an unassuming habitual practice implies a sense of obligation to participate, as though drinking is unavoidable, and not something the young women could actively refrain from doing even if they wanted to. Since alcohol is constructed as a routine and predictable part of an evening out, there is no space for negotiation.

'Nights out' are often described by the women in terms of how much alcohol they do consume and where they go; as Tracey described earlier, '*Thursday night is student night*' and this represents cheap drinks and dancing. During a discussion on 'typical nights out', Lexie's friendship group decided that they *usually* went out five nights a week and described what each night meant to them:

- Extract - Lipsy: *Every Wednesday is at the XXXX, Thursday normally XXXX [student night], Friday's normally again a quiet one, XXXX or local pubs (.) and then Saturdays generally are, all of us just get pissed together (2) depending on the night really (.) a Wednesday's always a chilled one up the pub, we don't (.) really drink*
- Mouse: *We just sort've (.) yeh (.) to talk about what we're doing at the weekend*
- Lipsy: *And then Thursdays, student night, XXXX 'cos its two quid a drink and then Fridays (.) normally just the XXXX isn't it?*
- Lexie: *I think it depends, I think Fridays' always different, whereas Saturday it tends to be always somewhere out (.) proper out on a Saturday (.) Clubbing (1) depends on how 'hanging' we are (2) it's very routine orientated*

Whilst drinking alcohol is a routine part of 'going out', different venues and different nights of the week are also, as Lexie explains, '*routine orientated*', and representative of 'how' much alcohol is consumed. As the women explain, Wednesday and Friday nights are *normally* spent at '*up the pub*' where getting '*pissed*' is not important; they are 'nights out' which are '*always a chilled one*' and '*quiet*', in other words, they do not '*really drink*' as they would at the weekend, but use these evenings to decide where to go on Saturday when they will go '*out*' and this usually means clubbing in a bigger town or city. Lexie does however point out that whilst Saturday 'nights out' are '*generally*' for getting '*pissed together*' this does depend on how much alcohol they have consumed the night before – '*how 'hanging' we are*' (ill effects of a hangover). The women's discussion again highlights their expectancy of alcohol drinking and the routine they have, and whilst there is an element of negotiation in terms of how much they drink as part of this routine, there appears to be no question that they will drink on 'nights out'.

Furthermore, alcohol is also constructed as a facilitator, as a means of doing something else (i.e. dancing), and often the contents of the beverage is immaterial compared to the cost. Terry points out that what she drinks really depends on '*what's on offer*' (line 7) or if someone else has bought her a drink. The women take advantage of student night promotions and discounts on alcohol (i.e. two shots for the price of one), often referred to in

the literature as 'up-selling' (MCM 2004). It would seem that not only is taste irrelevant – *it's always something really disgusting, but you still do it*' (see Esmee above), but the young women do not acknowledge the bars' potentially manipulative use of 'student nights' as a means of reducing their stocks of unpopular beverages. As Horstead (2009) explains, 'buy one, get one free offers' or 'up-selling' can give businesses a competitive edge, or are a way of getting rid of surplus or unwanted stock.

Whilst Esmee takes advantage of these particular evenings, she is keen to emphasise that she is not like 'other' people who take part because the drinks are cheap.

Extract – Esmee: *I don't drink doubles because I'm thinking 'I'm gonna get drunk more↓ (.) a lot of people do that↓, a lot of the time people drink doubles 'cos its cheap (1) I drink promotion drinks quite a lot because I like to try different things*

Esmee uses a disclaimer for her alcohol use, in saying '*I don't drink doubles [but] I like to try different things*', and this is despite her saying earlier in the interview that what she drank often tasted disgusting. The women's use of disclaimers and softeners (see Tracey above) highlights the tension between the world they are trying to describe and also trying to manage their self presentation to the interviewer. In drawing on Myerhoff's (1978) idea of 'definitional ceremonies', in which people enact not only 'what they think they are', but often 'what they should have been' (Papagaroufali 1992), Esmee's personal narrative becomes a performance strategy (Langellier 2003). Her talk above is an example of identity management in which she carefully constructs herself not as someone who '*needs to get absolutely bladdered*', or someone who drinks inexpensive beverages, but like Tracey and Terry, she positions her drinking positively, as a person who likes to be adventurous and try new drinks and will drink almost anything because it's a 'means to' or 'means of' having fun.

In the wider social discourses surrounding drunkenness, and within the UK's culture of intoxication, these women talk as though they have no choice, it would seem, but to join in. Being sober (or not drinking) is not an option they would either contemplate nor, it would seem, is it an available option if they want to socialise. Alcohol is prescriptive for going out, having fun and being seen – all of which are essential in their construction of a sense of self; as Esmee puts it:

'if you don't have a social life (.) then who are you?'

Furthermore, Esmee's talk emphasises how her life revolves around being social; as Griffin (2005:11) suggests, 'young women must drink alcohol if they wish to socialise' and Esmee talks of her social life as though it is the reason for her existence. In Esmee's social world alcohol drinking becomes a marker of identity, and belonging and acceptance within her social group; thus her social life is definitive of the person she wants (and has) to be. The value Esmee places on alcohol as part of her social identity is reiterated by some of the women in the friendship groups:

Extract – Candy: *I can't remember the last time we went out and not had a drink (.) yeh it's our social life, I like it yeh (.) yeh (.) otherwise it's a bit boring*

Extract – Lexie: *I think between eighteen and twenty-five (.) I think it's perfectly reasonable to have drinking as the main part of your social life (.) I don't think there's anything wrong with it, I don't think it's something you should be ashamed of, I think it's something you should be proud to say, "I've got friends and I go out and I get drunk and I have a good time" (.) like that's what you do when you're young and when you're older (.) you get married and have children*

Both Candy and Lexie's narratives emphasise the value these women place on sociability and how going out and getting drunk is a major part of this. As Lexie says, '*that's what you do when you're young*', in other words, the ritual, or ceremony, of getting drunk defines young people and in a 'culture of intoxication' Lexie and her friends enact their identities based on this prescription. It would seem that as far as these young women are concerned, their identities are constructed around alcohol, because Alcohol = Fun = Social Life = Existence.

However, this discourse of 'fun' competes with other forms of less celebratory talk, such as choosing to be sober which Candy says is '*a bit boring*', or, as Lipsy says:

Extract –Lipsy: *we go out to get pissed at the weekends 'cos there's nothing else to do*

Furthermore, whilst the young women talk about alcohol drinking as *just* something they do when they go out because it is expected many of them also talk of *needing* to get drunk in order to participate in other night-time activities such as dancing.

5.2.1 Drinking to dance or dancing to drink?

For the women in this study, dancing represented a major part of 'going out', and Friday and Saturday nights involved 'clubbing', which according to Malbon (1999:5) is, for many, both a source of 'extraordinary pleasure and a vital context for the development of personal and social identities'. The women as a group travel to larger towns and cities, which often involves a cheap overnight stay in hotels such as 'Etap' (cheap budget hotel chain), to dance at club venues. However, Tracey, for example, talks of her lack of confidence to go up and dance and how alcohol aids this transition:

Extract – Tracey: *I think 'Right, I can't dance if I don't feel drunk', so I have some more doubles and I think 'Right, I'm a bit drunk now' so I start dancing*

- India: *I hate being sober (.) I can't like dance when I'm sober and I just wanna go home early*

The question of drinking to dance was something most of the women talked of and is evidenced in a number of academic studies in which club-goers drink to overcome difficulties they have in venturing on to the public dance floor (Guise and Gill 2007; Northcote 2006). Both Tracey and India say they cannot dance without being drunk, yet the question of drinking to dance became the topic of debate within one of the friendship group discussions after Candy said '*I don't normally dance without drinking*' :

Extract from group:

Candy	<i>I don't normally dance without drinking</i>
Summer	<i>yeh, but (.) we went out in XXXX the other night and we didn't even drink (.) and we were on the dance floor all night</i>
Interviewer	<i>So you don't need the drink to dance then?</i>
Roxy	<i>No</i>
Candy	<i>well (.) some people I know say 'I'm not getting on that dance floor unless I've had a lot to drink' (.) some girls↓ (.) but then I think everyone just presumes you've bin drinking anyway</i>

So whilst all the women talk about alcohol drinking as a prescriptive part of an evening out, it seems alcohol only becomes a prerequisite for dancing when women feel uncomfortable and/or anxious about their 'visibility' in such a public space as the club dance floor. Candy says she does not '*normally*' dance without alcohol, but after input from her two friends in the group, Summer and Roxy, she discursively moves to the third person and talks of '*other*'

girls who need to drink to dance. It is also interesting that Candy finishes her sentence with the remark that *'everyone just presumes you've bin drinking anyway'*.

Dancing is also regarded as a way of attracting attention and whilst dancing requires confidence and represents another reason for consuming alcohol, Tracey explains that consumption that must be carefully managed:

Extract – Tracey: *we dance differently (.) like more than anyone else, we often have sort've a group of men around us watching (2) and it's not like drunk people dancing, it's kind of like off music videos sort've dancing, like (.) um (.) black women dancing, you know, like Beyonce, which does take a lot of confidence to do[↑]. I could not just go to a club sober and start dancing like that (1) I have to have a few sort've (.) dutch courage I guess drinks, but you can't be unstable on your feet otherwise there's a fine line between looking good dancing like that and looking like a twat dancing when they're so pissed*

Tracey is explicit about the sort of dancing she likes to do and uses the examples of 'black women', Beyonce, and music videos to describe this. Emphasising how this requires confidence to 'perform' in front of an audience of men, Tracey talks of drinking alcohol to give her '*dutch courage*', but she also talks of limiting her consumption because of its effect on how she 'performs' on the dance floor. The 'look' and 'looking good' again become an important aspect of Tracey's feminine performance and her talk highlights the difficulties she faces in negotiating the '*fine line*' between drinking a sufficient amount of alcohol in order to be able to dance like Black American women (e.g., Beyonce) and not drinking too much and making a fool of herself ('*looking like a twat*').

Desmond (1997:31) explains bodily movement as serving as a marker for the production of gender, racial, ethnic, class and national identities, which can also be read as a signal of sexual identity and other types of descriptions that are applied to individuals (or groups) such as 'sexy'. For example, Desmond writes that North American white culture has linked blacks with exoticism and sexuality, and Caribbean dances allow white people 'to perform, in a sense, a measure of 'blackness' (and thus exotic sexuality) without paying the social penalty of 'being' black' (p.37).

A further example is Railton and Watson's (2005:59) analysis of two pop videos, Beyonce's performance in "Baby Boy" and Kylie Minogue's in "Can't Get You Out of My Head". In their paper they suggest that Beyonce's performance reinscribes 'black female sexuality as firstly (hyper)sexuality, wild, uncontrolled and uncontrollable (an uncontrollability which also

reinscribes the black female body as available to the look of the spectator); and white female (a)sexuality is inscribed on and through Kylie's bodily performance as pure, restrained and controlled'. Tracey talks of emulating Beyonce's dance routines as dancing '*differently*' and therefore requiring '*a lot of confidence*'. Thus in line with findings of Desmond, Railton and Watson, Tracey might be perceived as discursively resisting the construction of the constrained white dancer by emulating the uncontrolled dance routines performed by black women dancers such as Beyonce. And in terms of availability, Tracey retains the attention of the spectator ('*a group of men around us watching*'), but not the putative sexual availability associated with being black. Nonetheless, a number of feminists and various sources of media have criticised Black stars such as Beyonce for their 'raunchy' videos and suggestive choreography, linking their performances to 'raunch' culture and an emerging 'pimp and ho (or whore) chic' which objectifies women (Frith 2006).

Whilst Tracey's concern is with how she 'looks' when dancing and this means she cannot drink to the extent of being drunk, India talks of not being able to dance unless she is drunk. As Lipsy points out, 'being sober' is a possibility, it is not something they want to do. What is certain is that both drinking and dancing are visible activities for many women participating in the night-time economy, and it is this 'visibility' which has become the subject of intense scrutiny by Governments and the media.

The question of how women might be understood as currently 'becoming visible' is the topic of much debate among feminists and academic writers, particularly in an increasingly sexualised culture. McRobbie (2009:57) argues that the new female subject is surrounded by visual (and verbal) discourses of public femininity which are 'less about what young women ought not to do, and more about what they can do' – and, indeed, what they should do. Although these young women 'must drink if they want to socialise', public alcohol drinking contradicts dominant (and historical) discourses of traditional respectable femininity; an arguably modified continuity of the temperance idea that respectable women don't drink (too) much (Fillmore 1984). Women who publicly drink not only contravene middle-class ideals of appropriate womanhood, namely self-restraint, moderation and decency (Hey 1986), but together, in groups, women are targeted by the UK tabloid press for violating norms of conventional femininity such as passivity, quietness and fragility (Meyer 2010; Montemurro and McClure 2005). As Measham and Østergaard (2009:417) put it, the public 'spectacle' of a young woman drinking is publicised as a 'doubly deviant figure of drunkenness in a dress'.

Perceptions of women's excessive alcohol drinking as deviant has a long history (Montemurro and McClure 2005; Sheehan and Ridge 2001), yet today (women's) public

drunkenness is seemingly socially accepted, if not 'expected', by young people (PMSU 2004:28). Nevertheless, whilst young women's drinking in the culture of intoxication is seemingly acceptable, her aesthetic 'appearance' is not necessarily so; nor is it accepted by those outside this culture who still see women's excessive consumption **and** their often 'scantily dressed appearance' as both problematic and disgusting (Skeggs 2005a).

It could be said that by getting drunk these young women are challenging those individuals and institutions morally obsessed with these historical ideals of appropriate feminine conduct. But the young women above clearly orient to being constructed as a problem, softening or adding disclaimers or including long justifications (re Lexie's extract above) and as I discuss in the following section, they also employ traditional, respectable discourses of femininity as a means of 'framing' 'other' women drinkers, and thus protecting themselves from such positioning.

5.3 'Othering' as a means of recuperating a respectable drinking subjectivity

Preparation for 'going out' is meticulously planned and executed by the young women to ensure maximum exposure in drinking venues, and getting drunk is deemed 'OK' providing it is a 'sober drunkenness' – a drunkenness which is acceptable – and explained as feeling drunk, but not looking or behaving drunk. Thus for these women drunkenness can be constructed in several ways; there is the 'acceptable' way which involves self-control, self-limitation and a constant attention to appearance and behaviour, or there is the 'wrong' way. And women who get drunk the 'wrong' way are often evaluated as such by specific processes of 'othering' and labelling these women as 'chavs', 'ladettes' and/or 'sluts'; women they regard as unfeminine and unrespectable, and as 'prostituting' their femininity in some way. For example, Terry talks below about several young women she is 'acquainted' with and the photographs she has seen of their 'nights out':

Extract – Terry: *I know (.) some of the girls' [she is referring to Esmee and Tracey] (.) Facebook pages I've seen, the way they represent themselves (.) wearing absolutely nothing and doing disgusting poses (.) ok I may wear short skirts and um (.) skimpy clothing but I always try to kind've make it look (.) smart, whereas these girls go out in like (.) fishnet stockings(.) and basically knickers (.) the alcohol makes them much more (.) makes them want to be noticed. I try and look feminine (.) I wouldn't go out like some girls (.) you know↑ (.) like big leather boots and basically (.) underwear for their clothing. If a girl wants to look feminine, she'd be kind've nicely dressed, she wouldn't look like a hooker (.) she'd be respectable. I think they look a bit rough, a bit*

chavvy and not feminine (.) it's a lot about the way you (.) present yourself (.) their appearance looks a bit cheap and tacky and a bit like they're just (.) gagging for it (.) like prostituting themselves

Terry's description of *appropriate* 'dressing up' is a one that *looks* feminine and, for her, this means '*nicely dressed*'; whilst this can still include *short skirts* and *skimpy clothing* Terry uses implicit discursive strategies of taste, class and judgement to differentiate between her '*look*' and that of Esmee and Tracey. Just as Skeggs (2004:100) suggests, Terry sees the young women's 'appearance' as the signifier of their conduct: '*to look is to be*', and as far as Terry is concerned she associates wearing *fishnet stockings*, '*big*' *leather boots* and *underwear* with being a *hooker*. Furthermore, she links the words *hooker* and *prostitute*, with more the commonly used terms of abuse such as *chavvy*, a word used by young people as representational of white working-class subjects (Tyler 2006), and *slutty* which is synonymous with words such as raunchy, immoral, obscene and vulgar (McCutcheon 2010:389); both used as a way of 'class/ifying' a woman's sexuality.

As Ringrose and Walkerdine (2008:230) propose, part of consuming oneself into being is the basis of 'being seen, being somebody, being noticed and belonging' and the markers for this are wearing the 'right' labels and the 'right' clothes. Terry discursively uses words such as *disgusting*, *chavvy*, *cheap*, and *tacky* to position this 'sexy' subjectivity as indicative of some lower-class or social positioning and Esmee and Tracey as women whose bodies are 'imbued with negative affect' (Tyler 2006). In Terry's account there seems to be a fine line between being femininely sexy and looking like 'a hooker'; as she says, '*girls that expose everything would only draw attention because they look easy*'. Yet this would suggest a rather critical view of women and how they present themselves in public. Terry's discourse of femininity is to always *put a lot of effort into being smart*, and this 'effort' is in making sure she doesn't *look easy*, or '*gagging for it*' (i.e., sexually available and/or overtly sexually desiring). She discursively talks of more traditional qualities of femininity such as passivity, niceness, and being respectable and smart, in becoming what Ringrose and Walkerdine (2008) would call an object of hetero-normative gaze. Her talk of '*others*' functions in allowing her a claim to respectable 'sexiness' by showing she is 'other' to 'disrespectable' women; it also holds the possibility of being (mistaken) for a slut at bay in classed talk. In '*othering*' Tracey and Esmee, as a means of pathologising their hyper-sexualised feminine identity, Terry often uses the word 'control' to describe how she, unlike Tracey and Esmee, is able to be both sexually attractive and respectable, and, in a way she is emulating the ideal 'upwardly mobile' neo-liberal subject, who demonstrates responsibility and risk-management (not out of control).

5.3.1 *'Pick and Mix' femininities or 'just' a respectable 'one'?*

Riley (2008:3) argues that young peoples' subjectivities are constructed not just from the free-floating, individualised 'pick and mix' identities orienting around leisure and consumption-based activities, but are also shaped by 'traditional' orientations to class, region, family and gender. Having access to and being able to participate in these identities is both complex and contradictory, particularly for young working-class women in the night-time economy.

Although it was the 19th century 'public' woman who was the target for surveillance and control, particularly if she did not conform to the ideals of respectable feminine behaviour (Hutton 2006), women today also face constraints when they go out. These constraints, very much apparent in the young women's narratives, are still based on respectability, performing acceptable forms of femininity in order to protect themselves as 'good' women. A discourse of reputation was used by the young women throughout their narratives; and whilst the term required no explanation, their implicit understandings of the consequences of 'getting a reputation' were clear, revolving around discourses of sexual respectability and moral discipline. Accordingly many of the young women talk of needing to appear respectable and to them this means displaying the right amount and type of femininity, and, more importantly, how others perceive their version of femininity. Their knowledge of femininity is not just gleaned from textually mediated sources, such as advertising and magazines, but also from *local knowledge*, whereby 'textual femininity is put into practice and effected through local interpretation' (Skeggs 2002:314); in other words, clothes are nearly always bought with friends and '*the Saturday shopping expedition*' (Tracey) and the '*bedroom catwalk*' (Peyton) are fun opportunities to not only try on numerous items of clothing, but involve 'collective discussion', and it is during these occasions that the young women 'learn' what to wear, and how and when to wear clothing in order to achieve the right 'look'; as Terry explained earlier, a woman needs to know how to look sexily *feminine* and not *cheap and tacky* like a *slut* when going out.

Furthermore, these women need to know that they are 'getting it right' and this is something they get, whether they want it or not, through the external 'gaze' of other women. This interplay, between recognising yourself and external validation, often gives rise to contradiction. In today's neoliberal, postfeminist culture there is no clear definition/knowledge of what is or isn't *the right way*, thus the process of 'othering' can be used as a way of claiming respectability. This can be seen in Terry's *othering* of Tracey and Esmee's appearance as 'slutty' and therefore unfeminine and unrespectable, and, alternatively, Tracey and Esmee construct themselves as '*ladies*', which historically equates

to femininity and hence respectability, and refer to 'they' and 'some people' as a means of 'othering':

Extract – Tracey: *they (.) very sort of (.) laddie and they don't act like girls 'cos I, I'm, I'm quite sort of old fashioned and I think (.) a lady should act like a lady in some senses and I don't, it's like*

Extract – Esmee: *I'm really old fashioned, some people are like 'You what! Your views are that? You're stupid', but I'm genuinely old fashioned (.) I'm a lady not a ladette*

Both Tracey and Esmee use the adage *old-fashioned* in talking about themselves as 'ladies' in contemporary society; this might suggest that they are out-dated in their views on how young women should behave and appear in public since a discussion between Velma's friends on what it is to be feminine implies that the word 'lady' has no place/space in their world:

Extract - Twee *I think of a la:dy as like going out in a nice pretty dress*
- Boo *I know when people have fallen over, I'm like (.) I wouldn't think 'Oh they're unladylike', I wouldn't think 'Oh that's being masculine'*
- Velma *no (.) it depends on how many you've had but (.) you'd [directing her conversation toward Boo] be more likely to walk in somewhere↓ and go 'Oh I'm going for a shit!' [laugh] (.) she would do it! Whereas I wouldn't say that, I think rolling around on the floor is not very ladylike*

On the other hand, whilst Esmee and Tracey use the word 'lady' to discursively position themselves as respectable, they also use it as a means of ensuring they are not 'recognised' as *ladettes* ('I'm a lady not a ladette': Esmee above extract). Popular discourses on the 'ladette' position a woman as dangerous and problematic, and the *ladette*'s perceived capacity for gender disorder and disruption of dominant gendered discourses (Jackson and Tinkler 2007) is the reason why, as a label, it is readily applied to women out drinking by the UK press. Thus Tracey and Esmee, in wanting to construct themselves as wholly feminine, clearly define themselves as ladies. However, as Twee elaborates, a lady goes out in a *nice pretty dress*:

Extract - Twee: *and you wouldn't go out like that, like the places we go (.) to be a lady*

Twee, Velma and Boo all agreed that they would not wear clothing *like that* to go out, yet they had differing opinions on how they perceived each other that seemed to orient around concern for how feminine and ladylike they were perceived. For example, Boo described herself as a *ladette* (line 1240), yet when Velma disagreed and said that she thought Boo was '*quite girly*' (line: 1246) Boo reacted with surprise and delight.

Many of the participants highlighted the importance of a lady subject position, for example, below Esmee and Velma both elaborate further by suggesting how and when they think a woman should behave like a lady:

Extract - Esmee: *I think women should be housekeepers and baby makers and men should go out and work*

Extract - Velma: *I think men should be men, and women should be women (.) in a relationship (1) but then as friends (.) its (.) it's different*

Whilst both women identify with the highly prescriptive gendered stereotypes which are linked to traditional social roles and power inequalities between men and women (Whelehan 1995), Esmee and Velma also make space available to enact alternative identities; in Esmee's narrative it is to be like '*the typical kind've outrageous person rock chick that I am*' (line: 290), and Velma indicates that women can behave differently within the company of male friends. Furthermore, Esmee tries to recoup a sense of individuality in identifying with what seems like two incompatible discourses, that of the old-fashioned lady and the 'rock-chick' and she partially does this by comparing her own views with those of her father on how young women should behave. On the one hand, she marks out her sense of independence, saying she is free to choose what to wear and how to behave, yet, at the same time, she position herself within wider traditional discourses surrounding women's respectability, and sex being about reproduction.

Extract – Esmee: *My Dad, being as stubborn as me, thinks a lady should be a lady and like things I get up to, things I say, the way I dress isn't specifically right (.) but I'm not a ladette, but I don't see why I can't go out and get drunk and be adventurous and have fun as a male can (.) he hasn't managed to (.) he hasn't been able to imprint on the things which he wants to imprint on (.) like with the way I dress, the way I'm always cuttin' and gettin' my hair shaved and coloured, and tattoos and piercings (.) I think he's just really set in it, old fashioned ladies need to be ladies. I love my Dad, but I'm not going to change the individual that I am[†]. I am really old fashioned though (.) I think women should be housekeepers and baby makers (.) I'm really old fashioned (.) I'm just a little housewoman really [spoken in a soft girlish voice]*

Esmee constitutes herself as being an individual (and traditional), but whilst she uses a 'gender equality' discourse to justify her 'right' to go out and get drunk just as men do, and extends these notions of women's rights and freedom of choice to her appearance, she does not mention feminism explicitly. Rather, it is in her narrative that we can see neoliberalism at work in emphasising a deeply individualistic discourse: *'I'm not going to change the individual I am'*. However, she is also keen to emphasise that she is not a 'ladette' which is often linked to being 'one of the lads', drinking pints and behaving badly (Jackson and Tinkler 2007).

In these extracts above, we can see the almost painful contradictions the young women face in trying to make sense of what they think they should 'be'; in other words, the discourses they draw on to make sense of their female identity. This dilemma emphasises Griffin's (2005) argument that, in some contexts, 'doing' femininity is an impossible space to occupy (let alone a doing it as a drinking female).

'Ladettes' are perceived as hedonistic, irresponsible, and 'out of control', particularly in the context of drinking alcohol and enjoying themselves, and are often regarded as beyond governance – as a 'social problem' which requires containment and control. However, the women in Lexie's friendship group, whilst identifying themselves as *'quite ladettey'*, minimise the potential problematic of their identification by simultaneously identifying as *'girlie girls'*:

Extract – Lexie:	<i>to be fair I think we're quite ladettey</i>
Lipsy:	<i>yeh (.) but girly girl too (.) we like to look nice [overlapping]</i>
India:	<i>I think we're a bit of both really</i>
Mouse:	<i>Yeh</i>
Lipsy:	<i>yeh but again that's like the stereotype thing (.) like girls are supposed to be girls (.) and that's not what we're supposed to be like. Why should we be called ladettes just because we drink beer (.) or we're loud or we do shots or we get drunk (.) that is what girls should be allowed to do which should be (.) a girl's thing (.) that's going back to um (.) you should stay in, have a baby, cook, clean and (.) be a housewife</i>

The four women agreed that they liked to *look nice* when they went out and they linked this to the more traditional figure of 'nice' respectable femininity by using the discourse of *girly girls* (Griffin et al. 2006). However, at the same time they were also keen to inject a sense of agency into their performance of girly femininity by rejecting those elements of what Lipsy calls *the stereotype of girly*, namely *being a housewife*, which entails *staying in, having a baby, cooking, and cleaning*. In trying to recoup a sense of equality with men in drinking

cultures, Lipsy argues that *being loud* and *getting drunk* should be a *girl's thing* (not just a male activity), but it would seem the only space for doing this is using a ladette discourse. In a sense, the young women illustrate how you can use both a 'nice' discourse, and a feminist discourse by rejecting the 'nice' requirement as old fashioned and sexist. However, like Tracey and Esmee, Lexie, Lipsy, Mouse and India also use a process of *othering* as a means of ensuring their femininity as respectable and this shows how, despite using a feminist discourse, feminist 'sisterhood' is absent:

Extract – Lipsy: *some of the ones [other women] last night were pretty horrendous weren't they? I mean in the XXXX, some of the girls that were drunk were like (.) 'sort yourself out love' (.) which I know it's silly I think that about them (.) but like a few weeks ago there was this girl who was really loud and falling over and I like (.) pulled a face and XXXX said to me, 'I don't know why you're pulling that face, its exactly what you look like when you've bin drinking' (.) but when I've bin drinking I like to think that I'm not like that*

Lipsy does not want to (mis)recognised as *like that* – *like them*, which, when I asked the women what they meant by 'like that', they all said 'falling all over the place' and 'loud', yet this they followed with '*we're always loud with each other*'. Lipsy's narrative shows how easy it is to be judged as one of these '*others*', especially since alcohol equals control and the women need control to avoid looking '*like them*': *falling over and loud*.

The young women extend their criteria for *othering*, as a further means of ensuring they are not (mis)recognised, to include a variety of labels:

Extract-Lexie: *rowdy black girls (.) but it's not, not that I'm racist or anything (.) they've got a lott've attitude*
 Lipsy: *yeh they're like (.) they look down their noses at you, they don't, black girls don't like white girls (.) they call us white trash (.) like if you started dancing with black blokes they would hate you*
 India: *and like chavvy girls in XXXX (.) like Vicky Pollard*
 Lipsy: *yeh venue wise (.) it's amazing, buts its full of sk:anks, absolute skanks (.) probably because it's quite cheap in there which unfortunately brings in the wrong kind of crowd*
 India: *yeh (.) we were well classy compared to everyone else who was there last night*

Evidenced in their discussion above, the women use labels such as *chavvy*, and '*skanks*' (Egan 2011) to define themselves as '*classy*' in comparison to other women they

encountered in the night-time economy. Whilst Lexie feels belittled by 'black' girls, '*they look down their noses at you*', she puts this down to 'black' girls being *rowdy* and having a *lott've attitude*. Hey (1997) reported similar findings with white working-class girls constructing black girls as 'hard' with 'bad attitudes' against which their own 'normalised' identities could be judged. Whilst Lexie uses the disclaimer '*not that I'm racist*', the women do seem to express a sense of discrimination; Lipsy talks of black girls' calling them '*white trash*', a term which Skeggs (2004) suggests racializes the white working-class in its association with disgust and waste, and this is an indication that the women know that they can be seen as working class. The *hate* Lipsy constructs if she were to dance with '*black blokes*' 'echoes' with Weekes's (2002) work, in which black girls construct white girls, who date black men, as oversexualised and unrespectable.

Much has been written on class analysis, focusing on both the targets of class-oriented ridicule and its consequences for working-class people (McRobbie 2004c; Skeggs 1997, 2004; Tyler 2006, 2008). Tyler and Bennett (2010) suggest a new vocabulary of social class has emerged in the UK in which the word 'chav', and its various synonyms and regional variations, become terms of abuse for white working-class subjects. Lipsy uses the word '*skank*' to describe some of the women she encountered at a night-time venue, adding '*like Vicky Pollard*' to illustrate to me (the uninitiated) what she means. 'Vicky Pollard' is a fictional character from the BBC TV comedy series *Little Britain* and has allowed/enabled derogatory use of 'chav' hate speech in liberal middle classes; "loud, white, excessive, drunk, fat, vulgar, disgusting", the female chav "exists to embody all the moral obsessions historically associated with the working class" (Skeggs 2005a:965). Not unlike the American term 'white trash', the 'chav' is used by the middle-classes to differentiate between their 'respectable whiteness' and that of the lower classes (Nayak 2003).

Whilst the women acknowledge they are 'loud and drunk' when they are out, to avoid being 'classed' as chavvy, they define themselves as '*well classy*' in comparison to the other women:

Extract – Lexie:	<i>You can just tell by lookin' at 'em like</i>
Interviewer:	So what does 'one' look like?
Lipsy:	<i>Greasy hair</i>
India:	<i>like bleached blonde hair with massive black roots</i>
Lexie:	<i>like loads of black eyeliner like all round here</i>
Lipsy:	<i>and they're wearing like clothes that are not like (.) were in fashion last year sort've thing</i>
India:	<i>you say it was a white top but (.) it's not our white</i>

Thus the women tacitly apply a 'class-based disgust' in '*othering*' women who signal chavviness; something Tyler (2008:27) examples as the 'Vicky Pollards' who wear badly applied make-up and bleached blonde hair', and '*chav being*' as the foreground for a 'dirty whiteness' (Tyler 2008:25) because they cannot afford this year's fashionable clothing. Constructions of whiteness function 'as a silent or unmarked norm, which serves to exclude or marginalise others' (Bryne 2006:12); and Reay (2008:1076) suggests there are gradations of whiteness (i.e., individuals are not perceived to be equally white), with 'the white middle-classes continuing to symbolically represent the ideal towards which others should aspire'. India's account, of another woman's clothes as '*a white top but (.) it's not our white*', invokes these symbolic ideals of white middle-class femininity and respectability, drawing attention to the variability in the colour white as an implicit way of demarcating the woman as *Other*.

Whilst 'being, becoming, practising and doing femininity' are, as Skeggs (1997:98) states, very different things for women of different classes, races and ages, appearance and conduct remain markers of respectability; and respectability is still an important issue for white working-class women today. As working-class women, Lexie's friendship group demonstrate that a 'drinking appearance' is the means by which they feel they can know and 'place' other women, and they assemble a form of 'hierarchy of placement' in positioning themselves as morally superior, or '*well classy*', to other women whom they code as *skanks*. Their narratives do, however, also emphasise how vulnerable they are in being labelled '*other*' themselves.

Many of the young women are keen to distance themselves from being labelled in derogatory terms; and one strategy for managing this was talk around being in 'control' as a means of constructing themselves as respectably feminine and *other* women as non-respectable, out-of-control and unfeminine. This process of *othering* highlights how forms of traditional femininity, deemed respectable, continues to pervade contemporary culture, a necessity I discuss below in relation to the context of postfeminism.

5.4 Young women drinking and 'control' in the context of postfeminism

As I discussed in chapter two, postfeminism has generated much debate among feminist scholars, with some feminists arguing that popular postfeminism enables women to reclaim traditional ideals of femininity without contradicting feminist principles (Coppock, Haydon, and Richter 1995), whilst McRobbie (2009:55) likens post-feminism to a 'double movement'

in which 'gender retrenchment is secured, paradoxically, through the wide dissemination of discourses of female freedom', something Nancy calls the 'pretences of equality' (2002).

According to McRobbie (2009) the meanings which converge around the figure of the post-feminist young woman are weighted towards success, enjoyment, entitlement, social mobility and participation; and these ideas often attract the UK media's attention particularly with regard to women's engagement with the night-time economy. Women are supposed to have won the battle against inequality, and yet she has now become an intensively managed subject who engages in a range of specified practices understood to be progressive but also consummately and reassuringly feminine (McRobbie 2009:57). Anything else is regarded as personal failure; a failure in which the contradictory demands of femininity, class, and (older) age are ignored, and sexuality is "straight"-jacketed' (Holmlund 2005:117).

5.4.1 Soberly drunk

Accordingly, the women in this study are understood as engaging in progressive practices by taking up public space in ways which were once the domain of men, while remaining 'reassuringly feminine' through their appearance and conduct. One of the ways in which the young women did this was to construct a successful and *suitably* respectable feminine 'appearance' through the discourse of 'control'. Control was discussed in terms of the amount a woman can drink, the types of beverages she can drink, and how she can drink; all of which they regard as a matter of personal responsibility.

Surprisingly, the 'responsibility' attached to drinking is not necessarily linked with aspects of personal safety, nor is it in relation to the possible health risks of drinking too much. Rather, the women's concern for drinking responsibly relates to how they will be perceived by others, and any woman unable to manage her alcohol intake femininely (i.e., monitoring appearance) is often regarded as *failing* in their femininity. Whilst getting drunk within the women's friendship groups is acceptable, with the occasional *slip* being excused, Terry emphasises how, for her, drunkenness is intertwined with appearing feminine and thus, respectable:

Extract – Terry: *I mean I've got friends that (.) I would still consider very feminine (.) that go out and get very drunk↓, but I think it depends on the way you act when you're very drunk (1) I mean I know you're not in control then, but (.) I don't think girls should probably get as drunk as (.) guys. [later in the interview] But there is kind've like (.) no in between (.) you do have to care, you have to know you're limits, but that doesn't mean you can't still go out and enjoy yourself, and occasionally (.) I mean obviously girls let that slip when they get (.) too drunk (.) but you still have to retain, you know, a certain image (.) like acting sober even though you're drunk [laugh] like (1) soberly drunk [laugh], because you can't drink loads, behave how you like and still retain (.) a good reputation (.) does that make sense?*

While Terry argues, for example, that she has friends who *get very drunk*, yet can still be considered feminine, the emphasis in this account is about the importance of *acting femininely* or '*soberly drunk*'. Terry judges other women on how they *act* when drunk, not the act of being drunk, and whilst she acknowledges that being drunk means not being in control, she still insists that a woman must maintain an sense of irrefutable femininity at the same time; and irrefutable in the sense that a woman's identity is not tainted with hints of masculine 'laddism' associated with the 'ladette' discourse. Terry uses the performance of acting '*soberly drunk*' like a 'discursive shield'; in other words she talks of '*acting sober*' to hide her drunkenness and still portray the message 'I'm feminine'. Terry's account, of acting *soberly drunk*, highlights the contradictions within discourse (Parker 1992).

Furthermore, and as discussed earlier, the women discursively *other* women by staking out their identity not just in terms of class (chav, skank) but also in terms of sexual reputation:

Extract – Tracey: *when she gets too drunk I get annoyed because she will get to the stage where she is screaming and launching herself on the floor, pissing up the wall, in front of men. She'll get naked in the middle of the street (.) so yeh when all these girls are sort've flash:ing and (.) acting like a guy (.) talking about stuff that they wouldn't talk about with guys if they were sober, like crude and that sort've thing. I can get completely smashed out of my face and still not (.) act like a slut*

Tracey says she can get '*completely smashed out of her face*' [very drunk], but she also '*keeps control over myself*' (line: 1053), and it is this power, of being 'in control', that is key in Tracey's decision-making as to whether a woman is a *lady* or a *slag*. Kitzinger (1995b) discusses the way in which the term '*slag*' is used to identify 'women who allow themselves

to be used' [sexually], however women who 'may be promiscuous' are not deemed a slag if they are perceived to be 'in control'. A case in point is Kitzinger's (1995b) example of Madonna whom she suggests not a slag because she conveys the message: "I'm sexually attractive but I'm powerful"; and Posh demonstrates the functionality of such competing discourses in a photograph of herself posted on Facebook after a night out:



Figure 36: Posh

In this context Posh discursively uses the word 'SLUT', written on her body in lipstick, as a form of irony, 'wearing' the word as a sign of deviance, as a way of saying 'I am a slut, so what?' And like Madonna, she flouts the implicit rules of acceptable femininity in public, by 'wearing' this stigmatising discourse proudly; it does not matter to her whether the message is conveying any truth or not, she is enjoying the attention that the message evokes.

Furthermore, unlike the conventional functionality of the discourse '*slut*' (see Kitzinger 1995b), it would seem that Posh is discursively using the word to demonstrate her power.

The power of being able to drink excessively, yet still be 'in control' is paradoxical in itself. And women's subject positions, as drinkers, are further complicated by this sense of class-based rejection and/or constrained by ideals of conventional femininity.

5.4.2 Control and being 'girly'

Several young women talked of 'choosing' to be '*girly*' drinkers, and consuming spirits and alcopops rather than pints which men regard as a more 'laddish' style of drinking:

Extract – Terry: *she was drinking a pint and they [men] did actually say 'Oh she's one of the lads now, she's a pint drinker'*

As Terry explains, drinking a *pint* is regarded as a male endeavour and if a woman drinks a pint she becomes '*one of the lads*', which leaves no apparent 'space' for female pint drinkers. Terry herself reinforces this standard by saying:

Extract – Terry: *I don't think (.) beer that sort've stuff is a very (.) sort've feminine drink*

Rúðólfsdóttir and Morgan's (2009) findings suggested that drinking was seen by their female participants as empowering and confidence boosting, yet at the same time these women often took on imposed gendered and classed behavioural codes and made them their own. For example, pint drinking was regarded by most as un-ladylike and thus '*flouting the rule*' of how to behave in what is traditionally regarded as masculine enclave. And like these women, rather than challenging the gendered way in which women are supposed to drink, Terry endorses this way of thinking. Esmee also shares their view that beverages, such as alcopops, are associated with being girly:

Extract – Esmee: *I must be very unfeminine because I drink like a lad (.) I like a pint of cider and it's not girly apparently. 'Girly' are alcopops and wine*

Esmee unsettles the idea of traditional gendered drinking in saying that she '*must*' be like a *lad* as drinking a pint is '*apparently*' not feminine; placing emphasis on '*must*' and '*apparently*' she is undermining the traditional norm that pint drinking is masculine. This also contradicts Terry's tacit suggestion that there is no feminine 'space' for women to drink pints. Nonetheless, it would seem that in order to appear and be 'read' as feminine, young women must choose smaller vessels and '*girly*' drinks. Summer's narrative corroborated this view:

Extract – Summer: *I don't even think it looks that nice when a girl's sat there with a pint (.) of beer (2) I heard some guys say it before like they think it looks better with a girl with even, even a half pint glass*

Yet, as Summer explains earlier in our interview, she '*always drinks quadruple Vodka, lemonade and lime, in a big pint glass*'. Aware of the male expectations for women to drink femininely, Summer resists this by drinking from a pint glass, yet she acknowledges that the contents of the pint glass is important if she is to appear feminine; therefore, rather than fall short of male expectancy, Summer drinks spirits instead of beer because she '*knows*' it will '*look better*'. The construction of how to be a feminine drinker is always, it seems, about how it is viewed by others: women presenting themselves as *feminine* or *girly* drinkers means '*half measures*' '*because they're wearing high heels and they're gonna fall all over*

the place’ if they drink too much (Esmee, line: 864). Pint drinking, it would seem, is a masculine practice, and the ways in which Terry and Summer talk about pint drinking functions by reinforcing this construction (Edley 2001).

The young women in this study thus use a number of discursive moves for being drunk and ‘acceptable; for example, looking as though you are ‘in control’: ‘*soberly drunk*’, and/or looking feminine: ‘*girly*’ whilst engaging in drinking. A further strategy is to merely look as though you are drinking:

5.4.3 ‘Faking it’

Friendship groups are the locus of young people’s identities, underpinned by a need to belong (Cotterell 2007); and individuals tend to identify with the attitudes of their peers which includes alcohol consumption and subsequent drinking performances (Johnson 2011). Research carried out has highlighted how gendered identities are accomplished and performed through drink-related behaviours (Griffin et al. 2009a; Ostergaard 2007), and alcohol also provides an excuse for transgressing boundaries (Beccaria and Sande 2003).

Following Goffman’s (1956/1990) thinking, young people often stage an impression for their peer audience, and tailor some of their conduct to the perceived identity of such. As ‘fitting in’ to maintain face is the rule of interaction (Goffman 1963:11), ‘faking it’ in terms of drinking is another way in which women can participate in drinking cultures whilst maintaining an element of control, as Esmee explains in the following narrative:

Extract – Esmee: *You’re see this sly girl (1) they think no one’s looking and they’ll pour a little bit away (.) and then go get another one (.) but bin like ‘Yeh I drunk too much last night’. Yeh I’ve seen people, especially girls, ‘Whoops I’ve dropped my bottle’ and they’re pouring drinks away*

By pouring alcohol discretely away, Esmee suggests that these women ‘act’ as though they are drinking a great deal of alcohol, ‘*Yeh I drunk too much*’ and this enables them to draw on the popular practice of *being drunk* and ‘fit in’ with their friends, but at the same time they can also manage their feminine appearance by being in control. She talks of being ‘*good at secretly not drinking*’ (line: 118), reinforcing the idea that drinking is prescriptive, and her account suggests that not drinking alcohol should be hidden because not drinking is somehow ‘socially unacceptable’ (Piacentini and Banister 2009) in the current ‘culture of intoxication’ (Measham and Brain 2005).

5.4.4 'Stuck in the middle with you'

Dora (below) describes herself as someone who '*always drinks, and tends to get really messy, but doesn't get stupidly drunk*'. She is keen to emphasise that she only drinks on weekends when her daughter is staying with her ex-boyfriend and she legitimises her 'right' to drink on the fact that she works hard and does not receive any financial assistance from the government. Dora's emphasis on the latter, is important to her sense of self as a single mother, particularly given the widely circulated disgust for the 'chav mum' in contemporary British media, identified as young, white and working-class (Tyler 2008). However, unlike Terry and Tracey, Dora does not use other women's appearance as a sign of classed identity but refers to students as a classed category and their subsequent alcohol use as a means of identification:

Extract – Dora: *I mean there's a lot of students come from rich, and posh families, but look at them now, they probably drink just as much as like what we drink. But, it's the attitude of the girls (.) they're just so rude, they don't care where they're not from there [Dora's hometown], they've got no respect (.) but then I think that's what uni's all about getting drunk. People that work and have a lifestyle, yeh (.) but it's like people on benefit, my mate, two of 'em they've got..kids (.) they get their benefits (.) but they won't go and buy like (.) electric or food first (.) their money would be going out (.) they get full housing benefit, they get full council tax, everything paid and then they get their benefit money and just go out on the piss with it*

Dora is a single mother yet she feels entitled to 'go out drinking' because she works; she strengthens her argument using a *scrounger* discourse (Cook 2006:54) referring to female university students and single mothers on '*benefits*' as a means of discrimination. McRobbie (2007:731) argues that young women are now encouraged to control fertility and earn enough money to participate in consumer culture, as part of an emerging 'new sexual contract', which simultaneously vilifies working-class motherhood as a form of 'failed femininity'. Similarly, Walkerdine, Lucey and Melody (2001) explain how young working-class mothers are discursively constructed through negative discourses, often encouraging constructions of teenage mums as 'welfare scroungers'.

Dora's disapproval of university students, particularly female students, is partially constituted through a discourse of *territoriality* (Holt and Griffin 2005) in her emphasis on '*they're not from there*'. And unlike Holt and Griffin's (2005) findings, Dora (as a 'local') does make explicit reference to class differences between students and locals by assessing the

'students' as coming from '*rich, and posh families*' and adding '*but look at them now, they probably drink just as much as like what we drink*'. Phoenix and Tizard (1996) argue that 'consumption signifiers' including behaviour, speech and dress construct the boundaries between the classes, and Dora uses these to simultaneously break down and reinforce these boundaries. She uses '*posh*' and '*rich*' alongside '*getting drunk*' as though they should be incompatible; furthermore Dora also uses a working '*classed disgust*' discourse (see middle classed disgust Lawler 2005), referring to the female students' drinking behaviour as '*rude*' and '*disrespectful*', as a means of undermining the stability of middle-class claims on respectability (Skeggs 2004).

5.4.5 'Mean Girl Culture'

The women in Lexie's friendship group also talk about how geographical 'consumption signifiers' in their participation in the NTE positions them in relation to *other* women; naming certain towns and cities, and various drinking venues, as attracting a particular 'sort' of female clientele:

Extract – Lexie: *I think it depends where you go, if you go to like (.) XXXX (.) I think it's different to XXXX town centre, I think XXXX's rougher (.) I like XXXX (.) it's a bit different, XXXX's expensive and posh. XXXX [nightclub] alright (.) but its full of stuck-up little bints*

Interviewer: Bints? Are they girls or men?

Lexie: *Girls, like women, but like (.) it's a nice club but its(.) it is just (.) they think they're better than us basically (.) and I don't like them*

Lexie, Lopsy and India all talk about particular towns and venues, giving reasons for their preferences which are very often based on their perceptions of other women drinking. As Lexie says, she likes one particular club because '*it's a bit different*' and looks '*expensive and posh*', however, this venue is not 'local' and in this unfamiliar territory the women feel *othered* by other female drinkers. In one sense, this unfamiliar club is like Foucault's panopticon, within which Lexie and her friends, in internalising the gaze of other women, feel insecure and vulnerable; and, in order to try and redress the power inequality, they retaliate by constructing these 'other' women as '*stuck-up little bints*' who *think they're better than us*'. According to the Oxford English Dictionary 'bint' is a derogatory British slang word, often used contemptuously, to describe a girl or woman, and Lexie uses it to emphasise her

dislike for these women. The women in Summer's friendship group also talked of their dislike for certain *other* women whom they identify as not 'locals':

- Extract – Roxy: *I think a lot of its bitchiness (.) do you remember that one last night (.) the really drunk one?*
- Candy: *what the blonde ones? They kept falling over*
- Interviewer: *Are these girls about the same age as you or older?*
- Roxy: *sort've 18, 19, 20 (.) yeh but they're normally younger if we don't know them*
- Candy: *yeh like some of 'em that do fall over do tend to be younger than us, and they come in from other towns (.) it's not that they're snobby as in posh, they're just snobby as in (.) they love themselves*
- Summer: *yeh and they've got the long hair that's all fake, they've got fake eyelashes and fake nails*

The three women, Roxy, Candy and Summer, like Dora, use a territorial discourse to construct the *other* girls the encountered as coming '*in from other towns*' and thus, unfamiliar with these girls, they adopt various strategies to construct these girls as the 'Other': they are younger and therefore *tend to fall over* because they cannot manage their drunkenness, and everything about them seems to be '*fake*'. Furthermore, Candy uses a classed discourse to point out that these girls are '*snobby*', but not snobby in the common sense of being upper-class: '*posh*', rather *snobby* in a narcissistic sense: '*they love themselves*'.

Later in the group interview, Lexie and her friends use discursive strategies in talking about *other* female drinkers, this time to rally against 'students':

- Extract – India: *I just don't, can't enjoy it, like I can't like dance when I'm sober and I just wanna go home early*
- Lexie: *I can do it as long as there's not students around me*
- India: *Yeh I hate students*
- Lexie: *like Thursday nights is student night, and I can't handle being sober 'cos they just annoy me (.) it's not strictly students (.) it's that it's a cheap night that (.) it's aimed at students*
- India: *they're so immature (.) they're loud (.) they don't dance they just jump around, chucking all their drinks everywhere (.) on you*
- Lipsy: *pushing you*
- India: *yeh and when I did it sober I just, I just wannit to beat them all up (.) they were driving me mad†*

Like Dora earlier, in her class assessment of students, India and Lexie talk of their dislike for 'students' because they are *immature*, *loud*, and boisterous, and it is this behaviour that

provides the women with a disclaimer for drinking alcohol since, under these circumstances, they cannot enjoy themselves sober.

The young women also manipulate their objection to young female students by using a *territorial* discourse to disguise any inferiority they may feel in terms of educational attainment and/or lack of disposable income. Yet they use this same discourse to distance themselves from *other* 'local' young women whom they regard as 'uncaring'. Amelie uses this process of *othering* in her disdain for such women:

Extract – Amelie: *girls that really, got some of them round here actually that are really, really rough, really kind of chavvy, I'm not putting a name on it obviously, but um (.) they're really chavvy, it's definitely their upbringing and their way of life and stuff and they can't help that but (.) girls that are really, they don't care, they don't care about school, they don't care about (.) all they care about is, you know, going out with their friends smoking drinking, doing drugs whatever (.) not having (.) respect for others or yourself I think*

Amelie says that the reason these young women *do not care* about themselves is because of their upbringing which is something '*they can't help*' or do anything about. However, Amelie uses the *chavvy* discourse to construct these women as immoral and irresponsible, although she adds that she is not '*putting a name on it*'. This is similar to Gill's (1993:79) example of how 'I'm not being racist' is followed by a 'but' as a form of disclaimer and Amelie's prerequisite may be to avoid being perceived as prejudiced.

The women's narratives suggest a sense of their being caught between two subject positions – *students* and other local women (*some of them round here*). For example, Lexie and her friends portray themselves, in a sense, as vulnerable by pathologizing the female student, who to them might represent middle-class success and meanness (Ringrose 2006). Yet, at the same time, Amelie, doesn't want to seem 'mean' in talking about 'chavvy' girls.

5.5 Negotiating male prejudice, control and violence

It is not just negotiating different groups of women that my participants talk about; they have to consider the men they meet too. For example, Velma below talks about needing to be *in control* and careful about how much she drinks when she goes out in the company of unknown males:

Extract - Velma: *I've been out with men that I trust↓, and I'd do just as I did with all my girlfriends [get drunk] 'cos they're male friends and I trust them (.) but if I was out (.) like if my friends met a bloke one night and then him and his mates are coming down to meet her (.) then no 'cos I wouldn't trust his friends, so I wouldn't get that drunk (.) if it was a group of men I didn't trust*

Velma articulates a strong distrust of men out drinking that she does not know, and as a result describes being wary of how much she can drink unless she is in the company of men she knows and trusts. This view is shared by most of the young women, in their talk about being feeling safe getting drunk in the company of their male friends; as Summer puts it, “*it's no different (.) being a girl*” (line: 450). However, being ‘*no different*’, despite ‘*being a girl*’ is also associated with being ‘*one of the lads*’ (Terry, line: 1016), and, according to the women, drinking like *one of the lads* leaves no space for any alternative identity, such as ‘girlfriend’. According to many of the women, men do not want to ‘date’ a woman who drinks:

Extract - Summer: *'cos my last boyfriend, XXX, he hated me drinkin' (1) if he started getting all shitty 'cos I was drinkin' it put me in a pissed off mood and I thought 'Fuck it, let's just go home'. It just made me feel like I didn't want to be out↑ (.) he like made me feel bad when I did drink (.) I don't think he liked me socialising really*

Extract - Dora: *when I'm with someone I don't really go out (.) like my last Boyfriend, he was so jealous↓, like when I did go out anywhere he was like 'What are you doing, where are you going?' and then I wouldn't stay out all night I'd make sure I was home early and I wouldn't get really, really drunk 'cos then he'd always say like 'Oh what have you bin doing?, you don't know what you've done', so I'm like 'Sorry', so I'd always make sure I wouldn't drink so much. I've never had an experience of being with someone that would let me (.) have a drink you know↑ (.) and let me talk to other blokes*

Both Summer's and Dora's narratives are ‘typical’ of the young women's talk about boyfriends' disapproval of their drinking. Both women suggest a discourse of powerlessness in the desire to go out socialising, which today incorporates excessive drinking as standard, and, as Esme pointed out earlier – not to socialise means you don't exist; yet both women felt compelled to go home early or made to feel apologetic or guilty for drinking alcohol. I suggest that these women, subjected to their boyfriend's dominance, are experiencing a

form of verbal 'heterosexual coercion' (Gavey 1992) with which they are compliant irrespective of their own desires. As exemplified in Gavey's (1992), and more recently, Livingston et al.'s (2004), work, the boyfriends here use verbal persuasion and persistence, rather than direct force or violence, to coerce Summer and Dora to feel they must not drink or even go out. Velma relates this disapproval to how she *appears* when she goes out:

Extract - Velma: *he [her boyfriend] disapproved of me going out all together. He didn't want me to go out at all (.) not at all (.) he was terrible (.) it was 'If you're going out you're not wearing that', 'if you're going out you're not having that much make-up on, you're not doing that (.) you're not to get drunk, you've got to come home at this time' (.) or like, he just made it so difficult that in the end there was no point in going out (.) he wasn't saying 'you're not going out', but he'd make it so difficult to the point that I'd be like 'Oh screw it' and not go*

Velma's boyfriend, like Summer's and Dora's, used verbal negative discourses to coerce Velma into thinking that there was '*no point in going out*'. By constructing Velma's *appearance* as 'inappropriate' in the sense that he forbids her to '*go out wearing that*' and not to have '*that much make-up on*', which would be her normal repertoire, he successfully undermines her sense of self. He restricts her behaviour further by limiting what she can do if she does go out, including any desire she might have for getting drunk. Threatened tacitly with the possible breakdown in their relationships, these women are 'heterosexually coerced' into resisting their own desire for that of their male partners.

It would seem that whilst on the one hand young women *appear* to be individualistic subjects of neoliberalism, acting as autonomous consumers enjoying the freedoms of the 'postfeminist moment'; on the other hand they also have to negotiate discourses of supposed 'new' femininity, and practices of alcohol drinking, which are arguably fraught with contradiction and are anything but free of 'controls' which manipulate and constraint their subjectivity, as the following extracts suggest:

Extract – Terry: *you're either one thing or another (.) you can't drink loads, behave how you like and still retain (.) a good reputation*

Extract – Tracey: *people think less of a girl for drinking however much she wants to drink if (.) she doesn't have control over herself*

5.6 Summary

The women's narratives in this chapter emphasise how difficult it is to drink excessively if you are a young woman, going out in the UK's night-time economy. Yet, whilst they are expected to drink if they wish to socialise, and it is '*just routine*' and '*just something everyone does*' in the current 'culture of intoxication' the prescriptive element of drinking means that the young women seem to be stuck in a 'we do it but don't know why' dilemma.

The young women point out that getting drunk is a major part of 'going out', since, it would seem, alcohol equals fun equals their very existence, and it's something '*you do when you're young*' with no space for negotiation. Nonetheless, this routine practice of drinking excessively is anything but simple, and the women talk of needing to be '*in control*' so that whilst they are joining or fitting in (drinking to get drunk), at the same time, they do not look or behave drunk – they are '*soberly drunk*' and '*in control*'. Thus, the discourse of 'control' becomes contradictory in this context, since the culture of 'determined drunkenness' is all about 'losing control', both psychological and physically, no matter how temporal, or 'controlled'²² it may seem.

The women highlight how being *seen* as drunk has implications, for example, they are simultaneously judged as having fun, yet emulating masculine behaviour and thus being labelled a 'ladette'. Furthermore, as working-class women, if they want to get drunk, this not only must be done in a controlled way, but also in an 'appropriately' feminine way to avoid being the implication of being denigrated as a '*chav*' and/or '*slut*'. The women's talk highlights how historical discourses of femininity based on respectability and sexual morality are still present in constraining and limiting women's subjectivity today. Their talk also demonstrates how young women, supposedly empowered by the normalisation of 'determined drunkenness', can just as quickly feel powerless through a process of '*othering*' on nights out.

It is clear from the women's narratives that as postfeminist subjects they need to be recognisable as heterosexual subjects and so they take on the appropriate accoutrements of femininity, such as doing their hair and wearing high-heeled shoes, in order to look and act acceptably, respectably and desirably feminine. At the same time and for want of a better term, a kind of 'pre-feminist' patriarchal dominance still continues to go on since the women, in dressing desirably, become **too** heterosexual (and risk being seen as sluts) for their boyfriends to want to let them go out.

²² Measham's (2004a:319) idea of 'calculated hedonism' operating within the boundaries of time, space, company and intensity.

Chapter Six: *Alcohol as Enabler: managing 'being on show' in postfeminist, night-time economy participation*

6.1 Introduction

Chapter five explored how my participants are expected to drink alcohol in the 'culture of intoxication', and whilst it is *just a routine* part of going out in the NTE, their drinking is also problematic. The women talk about their concerns in maintaining a respectably feminine identity, since drinking and respectability are often regarded as incompatible. Despite living in a society that supposedly provides opportunities for independence and success, women drinkers, particularly excessive drinkers, are still portrayed as deviant and constructed as pathological; the women talk about the contradictory and complex issue of trying to look as though they are *'in control'* in a drinking culture which is more about *losing control*. However, the women partially resolve this by drinking like a 'girly girl', and using various strategies to appear *soberly drunk*. The women also use a process of *'othering'* to demarcate suitably respectable feminine identities from classed and sometimes racist, female stereotypical identities such as the 'ladette' and 'chav'.

Additionally, the ways in which women enact feminine identities is further made complicated by a key theme in western political discourse that suggests 'women are winning' and 'have never had it so good' (Gill and Arthurs 2006:443). The media has promoted the idea of a "genderquake" (Wilkinson 1994), in which women are identified as equal and empowered sexual citizens. Yet, as Gill (2003, 2009d) points out, at the same time we are seeing the re-sexualisation of women's bodies as objects in popular culture combined with 'the mainstreaming and 'respectabilisation' of pornography in public space' (Gill and Arthurs 2006:443).

There is a 'powerful resonance between post-feminism and neo-liberalism', both structured by a current of individualism (Gill and Scharff 2011:7), and the intense expectation on *women* (to a greater extent than men) to work on and transform the self through self-discipline and self-surveillance, whilst presenting their actions as freely chosen. The women in this study articulated this expectation within the context of going out drinking; describing a dilemma of trying to blend contradictory discourses of expected drunkenness with looking sober, and expected sexiness with looking chaste.

In this chapter I draw on the idea of 'technologies of sexiness', as discussed in chapter four, to explore the contradictory nature of postfeminism in my participants' lived experiences. I discuss how the young women construct 'new' femininities within the context of post-

feminism; and identifying a number of themes, I reveal how, for many of the young women, technologies of sexiness and technologies of domination both contribute towards their understanding of what it is to perform a hyper-sexualised form of femininity in the context of 'going out' drinking. Themes include *'hyper-hetero-sexy girlie-girls'*, *'doing looks'*, and *'the heterosexual female gaze'*.

6.2 Self-objectification/subjectification in performing 'new' femininities

6.2.1 Hetero-hyper-sexy 'girlie-girls'

In unpicking the overwhelming sense of importance which these young women place on achieving 'the look' and its necessity when 'going out' reiterates Harris's (2004b:8) argument that a young woman's success is based on a 'public display', and that this success is contingent on personal responsibility and effort. This new form of 'girl power', a term added to the Oxford English Dictionary in 2001, and described as 'a self-reliant attitude among girls and young women manifested in ambition, assertiveness, and individualism', constructs young women as *pleasing themselves* (Gill 2003); so that work on appearance becomes understood as autonomous choice, as Velma puts it, "*I do it for me*" (line: 851).

Paechter (2006:255) describes hyper-femininity as a particularly exaggerated, emphasised and ideal performance of femininity, or femininity as super-girly; whereas Baumgardner and Richards (2004:60) define 'girl(ie)/(y)' as encompassing the tabooed symbols of women's feminine enculturation (make-up, fashion magazines, high heels) yet saying that just because women use them it is not a sign that they have been swayed by the marketplace or the male gaze. For example, whilst Velma's narrative suggests achieving a 'successful' sexy look is all about 'doing it for herself', it still suggests that her 'success' is, in part, dependent on 'an external male judging gaze' (Gill 2009d):

Extract – Velma: *yeh, but I feel more confident standing next to a man knowing I look good (.) whereas like my Dad would be like 'Yeh she's mine' (1) I'd rather stand next to a bloke and go 'Actually yeh, I'm with him (.) he's mine'*

Velma implies here that she can feel more confident that she is sexually attractive, that she '*looks good*', if she has a boyfriend. However, in order to avoid any suggestion that Velma's confidence is dependent on her being in a heterosexual relationship, she uses a historical discourse of patriarchy to recoup her sense of independence; she does this by shifting the

power, in such relationships, from *'she's mine'* to *'he's mine'*. McRobbie (2004a) would argue that Velma's narrative is an example of what she calls the 'double entanglement' of feminist and anti-feminist ideas that typify postfeminist constructions. And whereas Velma talks of getting dressed up as:

Extract – Velma: *I do it for me (.) I wanna look like a girl and I wanna feel like a girl so that's why I get really dressed up at the weekend I love doing that*

Posh, on the other hand, talks about the pressure young women are under to get dressed up:

Extract – Posh: *women my age have had to grow up a lot quicker than they used to (.) it's hard to be a woman these days, you've just got so much responsibility on your head, you've got all these other women, you know[↑], like all dolled up and looking at what you're wearing and (.) it's just, it's just all the time, go, go, go, go*

Whilst Velma's narrative discursively constructs 'dressing up' as something she chooses to do for herself because she wants to look and feel *'like a girl'*, Posh's talk constructs 'dressing up' (*'dolled up'*) as an obligation, as a *'responsibility'*. This is something Gill talks about; citing McRobbie's argument, Gill (2009b:363) suggests that women today are "imbued with agency and choice so that they can then use their 'feminist' freedom to *choose* to re-embrace traditional femininity", or as Probyn (1997:130) puts it, "a new age of 'choiceoisie'" in which postfeminism and new traditionalism go "handily together" in presenting the act of choosing as free from political and social ramifications.

Gill (2007a) extends Probyn's (1997:134) suggestion of a 'feminine sensibility' (the articulation of a specific feminine definition which emphasises pre-feminist ideals and normative heterosexual femininity), to argue that postfeminism should be understood as a 'sensibility' which emphasises the contradictory nature of postfeminist discourses and McRobbie's suggestion of an entanglement of feminist and anti-feminist themes within them. The enduring aspects of a postfeminist discourse include the idea that femininity is a 'bodily property', and today's media presents the idea that possession of a 'sexy' body is a woman's key (if not sole) source of identity (Gill 2007a:149). Whilst the female body is presented as a source of power, at the same time it is presented as 'always unruly', requiring constant monitoring, surveillance, discipline, and re-modelling in an attempt to conform to the narrow ideals of female attractiveness and, as such, is always at risk of failure. Furthermore, according to Gill (2007a:150) this intense focus on the female body is closely related to the

‘proliferation of discourses about sex and sexuality across all media forms’, which make up the widely debated ‘sexualisation of contemporary culture’. Key to understanding the ‘postfeminist sensibility’ is the idea that women are not straightforwardly objectified for the male gaze, but are desiring sexual subjects who *choose* to self-objectify themselves, and that in which sexual awareness and practice are central (Gill 2007a:151).

However, as Gill (2003) points out, this idea that being sexually attractive, smart and savvy – ‘doing it for me’, might appear to be the new package of young female success, but if women are just pleasing themselves, why is it that this ‘valued’ look is so similar, and equally, so popular? If women are entirely free agents, why do they internalise the mass-mediated, hyper-sexualised, ideals of femininity which all look the same? As Gill (2008b:436) asks, ‘how is it that socially constructed ideals of beauty or sexiness are internalized and made our own, that is, really, truly, deeply our own, felt not as external impositions but as authentically ours’. An example of the relationship between culture and subjectivity, could be understood in this form of hyper-sexualised girlie-ness, which “celebrates the accoutrements of traditional femininity” whilst producing a subject which understands agency as ‘image’ power rather than political power (Munford 2004:148).

McRobbie (2009:66) has referred to this manipulation of hyper-feminine girlie-ness as a form of post-feminist masquerade; in her words, ‘a re-ordering of femininity so that old fashioned styles, signalling submission to some invisible authority or opaque set of instructions, are re-instated’. Certainly a number of the young women interviewed talked of their intense attention to detail – of routine feminine practices of self-maintenance which go far beyond the more traditional practices that McRobbie uses as examples (e.g. manicures and pedicures); as Tracey explains when asked by the interviewer: ‘what goes through your mind in getting ready to go out?’:

Extract – Tracey: *girls that do go out are all tanned, they’re all (.) sort of completely dolled up to the max↑, so, that’s the main one is I have to be tanned↓. Um (.) it kind of starts the night before, you have to (.) shave everything, like (.) exfoliate, do you know what I mean, you’ve got to do everything and then (.) tan and, I usually wear hair extensions*

Tracey talks of having certain routines which she must undertake in order to compete for attention when she goes out, something Posh refers to as ‘*the catwalk*’ (line: 514) in her discursive construction of the ‘going out’ scene. In order to achieve a feminine ‘self-perfectibility’ (McRobbie 2009:63), which according to Tracey *all* the girls want – and which

seemingly means being '*dolled up to the max*', Tracey talks of needing to be tanned and how she usually wears *hair extensions*. Later in the interview Tracey elaborates on why long hair is a necessary part of the 'look':

Extract – Tracey: *the girls are the one that have to have the long hair that has to look immaculate (.) the guys can just shave theirs off (.) girls can't do that because then people will, will slag them off or call them a lesbian*

Immaculately groomed long hair is just one of the many routine feminine practices which, according to McRobbie, is 'required by all women who want to count themselves as such', and as part of the postfeminist masquerade,' they disavow the 'castrating figure of the lesbian' (McRobbie 2009:66). Weitz (2001:672) also states that certain ideas about attractiveness and female hair appear deeply embedded in society, albeit American, and to be 'most feminine and hence most attractive, women's hair should be long'. In citing the work of Lowe (1998), Weitz (2001) also draws attention to female bodybuilders who wear their hair long to enhance their attractiveness to men and protect them from being stigmatized as lesbian.

Tracey also draws my attention to her statement that she has to *shave (and exfoliate) everything*, and after emphasising the word 'everything', she asks me [the interviewer] 'if I know what she means?' I acknowledge that by '*everything*' she means including her pubic hair.

Research regarding women's hair removal in Western societies finds shaving arm and leg hair both an accepted and commonplace practice (Tiggemann and Hodgson 2008; Toerien and Wilkinson 2003); particularly in a culture where the presence of armpit and bikini-line hair is often the subject for scathing comments in the media (Gill 2007a). However, the elimination of pubic hair is not as normative and has quite different connotations. Tracey may be adopting the post-feminist masquerade which, according to McRobbie (2009), emphasises that the 'look' is freely chosen and one that seemingly disregards male approval; yet her requirement to shave her pubic hair as part of this 'getting ready to go out' repertoire suggests something else is going on here. Current advertising and social commentary, in both women's magazines [e.g. Cosmopolitan] and films [e.g. 'Sex in the City'], present pubic hair removal as glamorous, sexy and liberating (Tiggemann and Hodgson 2008), with women giving 'sexiness' as their reason for depilation (Smolak and Murnen 2011), and depilation being necessary for maintaining their femininity (Toerien and Wilkinson 2004). The various reasons for hair removal do emphasise how socially constructed ideals of beauty are internalised by young women –'policing' their bodies within

a narrow ideal of social acceptability. Furthermore, Toerien and Wilkinson (2004) suggest that women are socialised to perceive themselves as the object of the male gaze, and thus engaging in this practice, of pubic hair removal, is related to a perception of increased sex appeal.

The requirement to sexually self-objectify oneself has become part of the debates surrounding the sexualisation of women. It is argued that in nearly every media form available, including television, music videos, music lyrics, magazines and advertising, there is evidence of women being portrayed in a sexual manner and objectified, and these modes of femininity are internalised by female consumers (Aubrey 2006; Nowatzki and Morry 2009). Under the guise of female freedom and choice, women are arguably being 're-inscribed as sexual objects' (Gill 2007a:163). For example, the power of these discourses can be found in Tracey's use of words such as 'have to' and 'must' when she talks about dressing up in a certain way:

Extract – Tracey: *A girl will have to choose an outfit and think carefully about everything they do, not because they want to, but because they feel they have to. In an ideal world I'd just get my clothes on and go out like a guy would (.) but if I did that there are repercussions, girls would take the piss out of me (1) we don't like being overlooked*

In this extract Tracey talks of having to think about not just what she wears but 'everything' she does when she goes out; '*being overlooked*' is a source of her having to think about '*everything*' and her talk is justifying 'the look'. There is a sense of fragility about Tracey's identity of being a woman in the public eye, particularly as she feels she must be 'compulsorily sexy' (Harvey and Gill 2011), yet at the same time needs to manage her 'sexual performance' in such a way as to avoid being repositioned or derogated by others. As Jackson's (2006) paper demonstrates – the figure of 'girl power' collides with institutional heterosexuality and conventional femininity highlighting the precariousness and fragility of these new sexual subjectivities. Furthermore, as a number of the young women have implied, and Tracey's narrative above highlights, there is a need to be 'validated' by being looked at, and '*being overlooked*' has serious implications for their subjectivity.

In discussing the implications for postfeminist subjectivities, Harvey and Gill (2011) build on Foucault's ideas about technologies of selfhood and Deleuze's notion of 'becoming' to suggest the concept of sexual entrepreneurship. This idea is partly built on Radner's concept of a 'technology of sexiness' in which she suggests that the task of young women is to 'embody heterosexuality through the disciplined use of makeup, clothing, exercise and

cosmetic surgery, linking femininity, consumer culture and heterosexuality' (Radner 1999:15), and partly on their argument that women are now required to perform a confident sexual agency which is central to this technology of the self (Harvey and Gill 2011:56). This suggestion does not deny the agency and dedication required by those who 'choose' to take up this 'new femininity', nor refutes the pleasures which that may involve; in as much that 'this new feminine subject has become a normative ideal', Harvey and Gill want to highlight the extent to which this subject has opened up a language in which subject-object, power-pleasure, discipline-agency are no longer set against one another as 'antithetical, binary opposites' (Harvey and Gill 2011:56). Aspects of this 'sexual entrepreneurship' are evident in the women's narratives when they express how much they, and their friends, enjoy dressing up to go out. Often their talk highlights an alternation between *provocateur* discourses of freedom and choice, and *provocateur* discourses of self-objectification (see next chapter); just as Harvey and Gill point out in arguing that the language of the new feminine subject is one that concerns both, and Evans, Riley and Shankar (2010) argue in highlighting the doubled nature of discourses.

6.2.2 "Being noticed" and "Doing Looks"

Coleman (2008:163), and latterly Harvey and Gill (2011), develop Deleuze's idea of 'becoming' by arguing that bodies are 'not separate to images [in the media] but rather are known, understood and experienced through images' and I suggest these 'images' include other bodies. Just as Deleuze (2005) proposed that bodies both affect and are affected by other bodies, the young women in this study talk about the bodily presence of other women. They know that when they go out, the places they visit will be:

Extract – Amelie: *just full of beautiful people and then (.) you're there. You're just like 'what are you looking at?' yeh, everyone stares at you, checks you out, and not in a good way in like (.) 'Oh what's she thinking, what's she wearing'*

The young women talk about the *beautiful* bodies around them and how they do not want to be overlooked; as Tracey explains, she and Esmee dress for effect – to be noticed:

Extract – Tracey: *I like to (.) dress up so I'm noticed (.) both me and Esmee both do (.) so (.) it involved a lot of drinking, a lot of shots (.) that's why we go out, it's not for the boys, it's not for (.) seeing everyone, it's not for getting drunk, it's so we can be noticed*

Tracey says she and her friend Esmee *dress up* to be noticed and in order to do this it involves *a lot of drinking*. With Amelie's comments in mind – that the venues the women visit on nights out are full of beautiful people – incites not only a personal sense of 'lacking' in some way – Amelie talks of '*and then (.) you're there*' as though she feels a sense of inadequacy among these *beautiful* women; but it also suggests these venues are a platform for competition among all the women present.

The young women describe doing 'looks' in terms of something they must wear and also something they must be aware of. Images, of 'the look' of other women (and in the media), are internalised by the young women and as such they are 'induced into a permanent state of conscious and permanent visibility', which Foucault describes as a major effect of the Panopticon. The women experience the effect of "inspection functioning ceaselessly" and "the gaze [being] alert everywhere" (Foucault 1977:195), and through an alcohol assisted process of '*becoming*' (Coleman 2008) these women '*bring into being the new feminine subject*' (Harvey and Gill 2011:56). The young women expect to be 'looked at', and 'doing looks', on this basis, is part of a contemporary form of power. Foucault identifies this as 'disciplinary power', exercised by surveillance, rather than force, which leads the women to behave as though they are constantly being watched. This sense of being watched, when internalised, leads to a state of permanent 'self-policing'. Thus, as Foucault (1977:155) writes, 'there is no need for arms, physical violence, materials constraints. Just a gaze, an inspecting gaze' and the implications of panopticism are, as Posh explains, difficult, if not impossible, to maintain:

Extract - Posh: *sometimes you can't (.) actually keep it up all the time*

Posh also talks of the 'first look' in terms of how a woman's initial gaze is very important:

Extract – Posh: *I do care what they think about me [other women] because first opinions count for a lot↑ (.) everyone judges someone on the first look of them (.) I mean if you're looking scruffy and untidy*

Posh's narratives highlight an acute sense of being *looked at* with the initial gaze being so decisive that it would seem her identity is formed immediately upon this visibility and recognition. As Skeggs (1999:214) puts it, discourses of respectability are central to how women feel able to occupy space and women's access to public spaces has often been

controlled by visible respectability (Nava 1996). Conversely Sienna is aware of the constant visibility and talks of girls '*constantly looking more so at other girls (.) like constantly judging other women against themselves*' (line: 422-3), yet the alcohol she drinks enables her to feel less sensitive to this inevitable gaze:

Extract – Sienna: *once I have had a few drinks and I'm out (.) I'll stop caring what I look like (.) once everybody's looked at you that's fine (.) like I'll stop going into the toilet and lookin' in the mirror, I'll, you know, go to the loo and walk straight out, I feel like I don't care anymore (.) it's more about (.) 'Right I'm gonna walk in the door' and (.) everyone'll turn around and be like 'Oh she looks nice' and (.) once you've seen everybody (.) and they've seen what you look like (.) then it doesn't matter [laugh]*

Sienna's sense of a self as accepted and acceptable in the 'going out' culture does rely on the 'gaze' for validation that *she looks nice*, and she is consciously aware that as soon as she arrives at a drinking venue she will be looked at: '*everyone'll turn round*'. However, the alcohol she drinks enables her to 'manage' the gaze and she gradually stops *caring* about what she looks like; she will stop *lookin' in the mirror* to check her appearance every time she visits the toilet because she has got the endorsement that she looks good from that first gaze. This is an example of how women manage this pressure (like the strategies the women use to manage their drinking re: chapter five); but, although this strategy works for Sienna none of the other participants describe having one, which suggests at least the possibility that they may feel continuously under the gaze whatever the point in the night – and for some, during the daytime too.

Within the women's narratives there is a sense that they must maintain an immaculate appearance of hyper-sexualised femininity because they are being *looked at*, and drinking spaces become a form of 'catwalk' or 'beauty contest' on which their feminine identity is scrutinised and judged. Several women described how this awareness, or *becoming*, often restrains what they wear, even during the daytime. For example, '*trackies*' or '*jogging bottoms*', are deemed comfortable and ideal for '*slouching around the house*' (e.g. Summer, Posh), but they are not 'suitable' for wearing 'out'.

Extract – Posh: *you're just keepin' that face on aren't you, you're just (.) you think to yourself 'If I was on a catwalk, you don't know who you'll bump into (.) you've always gotta look your best'*

Posh makes an analogy between her daily life and a 'catwalk'. She must *keep that face on* and *look her best* – because she is aware that she is under the 'gaze' and the gaze is

everywhere (Foucault 1977) in the sense that *'you don't know who you'll bump into'*. The fear of being ridiculed and derided for not trying to 'look' or *become* the ideal new feminine subject, confirmed through the gaze of other women and men, is too great for many of these young women. Any attempt to rebel against the narrow regulating ideals of femininity, which forms part of the all-seeing 'gaze', Posh suggests, is futile:

Extract – Posh: *I think that's the way society's made us (.) just like its normal (.) through magazines and (1) lifestyles. [later in interview] It's the public eye (.) a girl's gotta be dolled up, you know they've gotta look fantastic, natural is a mess darling [spoken in an affected 'posh' voice]*

And while McRobbie (2009:66) argues that the source of women's submission to feminine ideals is an 'invisible authority', from the comments made in my participants' talk I would argue that many of these women are overtly aware of where these authoritative discourses of ideal femininity stem from. As Posh says, *it's the public eye, magazines and images of lifestyles* which dictate that a woman has *gotta be dolled up* to look immaculate, since the natural 'look', according to Posh, is *a mess*. Sienna also talks of her femininity as something that must be reflected in her appearance; when I asked her if she would describe herself as feminine she replied:

Extract – Sienna: *In terms of the way I like to look, yes (.) and sometimes in the way I act, yeh (.) I cannot (.) not not be feminine*

Sienna expresses that she *'cannot not be feminine'*, as though it is something inescapable and any alternative to looking (and becoming) feminine is impossible because there are no other discourses to do so. Furthermore, Sienna's talk highlights how being looked at is a double-edged sword, desired, yet also feared. Sienna feels either she will be ridiculed, like Tracey [below], or the social reality of doing anything different would render her powerless, unattractive and consequently, unfeminine:

Extract – Tracey: *because I've had occasions where I've thought 'Right I don't care what people think what I'm wearing', and I go out, say without much makeup on or (.) like tracky bottoms or something and (.) girls will look at me, sneer at me um whisper about me sort've (.) and, God it makes me feel terrible↑, and I think 'God I'm never going out, I've got, I'm, I have to wear makeup, have to wear (.) everything'*

Tracey talks of trying to escape the 'disciplinary technologies' (Gill 2008a) which regulate her appearance when she goes out, but the outcome of doing so is so unbearable – *it makes me feel terrible* – that she resigns herself to conform and *become* so that her femininity is 'known and understood' (by the other women) (Harvey and Gill 2011). Tracey's narrative highlights the way in which disempowerment and lack of agency pervade Tracey's *becoming*; and how discourses of neoliberal individualism work through the 'gaze' to make Tracey feel she is failing in some way. Tracey, like so many women, is expected to transform herself – her body is a canvas that affords a successful image no matter how hurt or vulnerable she may actually feel (Gill 2007a). As Tracey says, her discomfort with and/or unwillingness in *becoming* a successfully beautiful 'sexy' feminine subject, invokes *sneers* and *whispers*. Her constant visibility, of being under the gaze, means *girls will look at (me)* her – they become her judge and jury. This, Gill (2009d:104-5) explains, is one of the problems of sexual subjectification, it is not only 'a highly specific and exclusionary practice', but also a practice which renders invisible what Goldman (1992:125) called the 'diverse forms of terror experienced by women who objectify themselves'.

Many of the women in this study, including Tracey, have talked of not wanting to be 'overlooked' and their desire to be noticed by others as a form of validation. It is these same 'looks' that invoke a sense of terror in Tracey to comply with the discourse of sexualised feminine subjectivity. As Gill (2008a:35) puts it, sexual agency has become a form of regulation that requires the re-moulding of feminine subjectivity to fit the current postfeminist, neoliberal moment, and rather than being the solution to the 'missing discourse of female desire' (Fine 1988) it is a technology of discipline. Furthermore, as Tracey's narrative suggests, any possibility of accessing alternative discourses of feminine identity is difficult, if not impossible, for these young women going out.

6.3 'Heterosexual female gaze'

Whilst Skeggs (2001:304) suggests that the mirror 'confirms whether or not the appearance is convincing, and also confirms one's value and one's place in the corporeal schema', in this section I extend this suggestion and propose that 'other' women also act as a mirror in which one can perceive their gaze and their comments as a reflection of their physical evaluation. In the following analysis I have explored the young women's sense-making of the heterosexual female gaze and how it plays an important and dominating role in their experiences of 'going out' and drinking. For example, in Esmee's narrative below, she constructs women's 'bitchiness' as a form of symbolic violence in which she is the victim of

unwarranted criticism and unwanted stares. Furthermore, Esmee says some women 'know' they look hot, described by Levy (2005:31) as another word for sexy, and this 'knowing' implies a sort of arrogant superiority in the scales of 'hotness', and these women use and abuse their 'hot' superiority to make women like Esmee feel inferior and de-valued by '*treating her like shit*'. Being treated *like shit* is another implicit discursive form of discrimination because it effectively excludes Esmee on the basis of 'hotness' as a positive source of identity:

Extract – Esmee: *if people like me, you're in the loo, typical girly meeting-up place, some girl'll be like 'Your hair looks wicked, I love your outfit', that makes you feel even better than when a guy says it (.) because girls are so bitchy, you get a couple of drinks down and a typical female, you know, they don't care if they hurt your feelings or give you a 'look' (2) they don't give a shit what you look like, whether you look hotter or not, or anything like that, they can be really bitchy, girls are very bitchy. These are the girls that know they look hot when they go out and they use it*

Esmee explains that her sense of success, in terms of her femininity being recognised and endorsed as 'respectably sexy', relies on the female gaze, and in suggesting that all women/'*typical female*' are '*bitchy*', she draws on a deeply stereotypical essentialist discourse to make sense of her experience; hooking into the idea that alcohol encourages women to apply this judgemental 'look'.

Furthermore, Esmee's experience of being '*in the loo*' reiterates Skeggs (2001) observation that toilets 'heighten the sensitivity to appearance because looking is one of the main things to do, and it is within this social space that a woman's appearance is visually evaluated; how a woman 'uses feminine artefacts and clothing shows how different interpretative systems come into play' (Skeggs 2001:298). It is within this social space, '*the loo*', that Esmee's investment in looking 'hot', has, she says, been ignored; nobody (other women) verbally endorses her self-evaluation that she looks 'good', and with only the female gaze to go on, as far as she is concerned perceiving no comment at all is as bad as any denigrating remark.

With an immense expectation on women to meet the idealised images of hyper-sexualised femininity, their identity as such relies heavily on 'getting it right', and this, it seems, is judged by other women's responses to them. A woman's acceptance and endorsement of 'doing it right' can be a painful process. Women become part of a panopticon when they 'go out', with their identity scrutinised. Yet this scrutiny is not just in terms of female intrasexual

competition for the male gaze, but is, perhaps even more so, for other young women's approval; thus their identity requires approval for its own sake too. The female gaze has the ability to undermine the women's confidence, and in acting as a mirror, it can reflectively make or break a young woman's sense of self as 'good' in every sense of the word.

I now unpack the various ways in which the young women experience and make sense of the heterosexual 'female gaze' in the context of 'going out' and drinking.

6.3.1 'To-be-looked-at-ness': "it's all about being seen"

In the context of drinking alcohol and '*doing the look*', the women explained how getting drunk must be carefully managed because both necessitate a strong sense of being '*on display*' (Tracey, line: 851), and very often this 'display' is not just for the male gaze, but, more importantly, for the female gaze too. The women often talk about 'going out' as synonymous with a *competition* for attracting 'gaze':

Extract – Tracey: *it's like a competition almost (.) it's so is, all the girls have sort of got their peacock outfits on (.) trying to attract the male attention. I like to make myself look attractive for men and make girls in a way feel less attractive*

In this context Tracey uses the word 'peacock' in the reverse sense of Darwin's theory of the male peacock, displaying his beautiful tail to attract females. She emphasises her desire to outshine other women: to '*make girls feel less attractive*', yet later in the interview Tracey constructs this 'competition' as time dependent:

Extract – Tracey: *like I say, every girl, whether they are (.) the majority (1) will be in competition with each other. Not even for male attention, but for female acceptance, like (.) for some girls, like during the day I dress (.) so that (.) girls will like what I'm wearing, during the night I dress so that men will like what I'm wearing*

During the day-time Tracey's authenticity in becoming a feminine subject requires the validation of other women; she competes with other women for *female acceptance*, but not on the basis of 'who' she is, rather it is on the basis of what she is wearing (see Goldman, 1992 above). However, when Tracey goes out in the evening she *becomes* a 'sexual' feminine subject and her success in '*becoming*' is endorsed by male attention. Sienna's narrative below both contradicts and shares a similar view to Tracey.

Extract – Sienna: *it's all to sort've (.) look better than the next girl (.) but it's almost not even become about, for may be, men (.) it's just between girls*

Sienna acknowledges that the competition amongst women '*to look better*' is '*for men*', but at the same time she suggests that it almost become a competition '*just between girls*'. The women present femininity (and beauty work) as something which requires maintenance; a constant process of self-monitoring and *becoming* in order to maintain expected standards of femininity, and also to enable them to compete for attention. Tracey, together with many of the women, looks to other women for validation in as much as what they are wearing is acceptable; in other words, they look no different to each other, something Gill (2007b:73) notes in questioning whether girls are really autonomous, freely choosing individuals, 'pleasing themselves, when the look they achieve – or seek to achieve – is so similar'. This acceptable similarity thus poses no direct threat in competing for male attention.

Contradictorily however, Tracey and Sienna also talk of '*being in competition with each other*' to '*look better than the next girl*' as each woman is urged to draw on neoliberal discourses of individualism in order to outdo each other; in other words, they are all 'aware that they may be judged and found to be 'lacking' in some way' (Hollows 2000:159) and it is in their endeavour, to *look better* than their rivals, that alcohol plays a significant role.

Since most of the women talk about wanting to 'be-looked-at' by men as sexually attractive, and by other women in admiration/envy, they suggest that a hyper-sexualised feminine appearance is necessary in achieving this. According to Tracey and Esmee, looking confidently sexy depends on bodily exposure – on having '*enough flesh out*' (Esmee, line: 275). Tracey talks of feeling unattractive if she is not '*naked enough*', adding that she does not feel '*attractive unless I've got like legs and chest out*' (line: 351-2) and a revealing outfit on:

Extract – Tracey: *I didn't feel attractive at all (.) I felt like everyone was just completely overlooking me, not noticing me really (.) 'cos I didn't have as much flesh showing*

Both women talk at length about not wanting to be '*overlooked*' when they go out, and their appearance in terms of sexiness is paramount in attracting attention. Both Tracey and Esmee compare themselves with each other in their individual accounts of how confident they feel when they go out. For example, Tracey talks of Esmee as having an '*overly amount of confidence*' (see above extract) and does not need to expose her flesh because

she is already confident and whether '*covered up or not, she still pulls it off*' (line: 367). Yet Esmee talks of her lack of confidence compared to Tracey whom she says:

Extract – Esmee: *Tracey won't ever go [out] covered up though (.) "I'm not naked enough" [imitates her friend's voice]) I don't know how she does it, but I've started gettin' confidence*

Both young women assume each other is confident, or can 'act' confident; Tracey talks about the difficulty she has in 'acting' confident and uses the idiom '*pulls it off*' to describe the ease with which Esmee's seemingly acts confidently. However, it would seem from their narratives, that neither of them actually felt confident when they go out and this raises important issues in trying to understand the complex relationship between these young women and their appearance.

Esmee is keen to point out that she likes '*getting attention*' but '*hates being centre of attention*' (line: 250), and her dislike of being centre of attention and lack of confidence in her appearance reveal a sense of insecurity and heightened self-consciousness. This is reiterated in her talk about her body:

Extract – Esmee: *'cos I don't like I' my flesh out, I hate it (.) I hate getting my legs out so much (.) I'm always covering myself up and then it gets to the point of a night where I just (.) wish like I could escape before the light comes on*

Esmee talks about her dislike of exposure; she says that she *hates getting her legs out so much* and this suggests a feeling of insecurity emphasised by her desire to *escape before the light* comes on. Tseëlon's (1992:301) argument is that women commonly experience being permanently on show and as such their femininity is a constant and on-going public performance in which self-conscious presentation is a necessary part; she further argues that 'uncertainty is built into the construction of beauty as defining social and self-worth'. Throughout the narratives, Tracey and Esmee (and most of the interviewees) talk of a constant visibility when they 'go out', and their 'attractiveness', which they interpret as 'looking sexy', as something that must be publicly performed; yet within their talk there is also the sense that this performance is boundaried by insecurity. Insecurity which as Tracey says is temporarily suspended by drinking alcohol – '*I have to get absolutely drunk off my face just to fit in*' (line:218).

Having the confidence to compete for the gaze is talked about throughout the interviews, with the women often citing it as a reason for drinking alcohol. For example, the general consensus in Summer's friendship group discussion was that alcohol gave them the confidence to initiate conversations with men, and Summer went as far as to say that she did not think she could talk to 'guys' if she was sober (line: 834). In another group discussion, Twee suggests:

Extract - Twee: *it's all about attention (.) and if I haven't bin drinking I feel awkward*

Tracey also suggests that, for her, alcohol is necessary in giving her the 'confidence' to enact a hyper-hetero-sexualised feminine appearance, and this is something most of the women suggest is necessary for attracting male attention; and one they often perceive as being necessarily ultra-sexy.

Extract - Tracey: *we sexed the outfits up a bit and got most of them from Ann Summers (.) and wore like stockings and suspender belts and stuff with them (.) we got stared at quite a lot. I was drinking on the train on the way there though (.) alcohol helps me feel confident about what I was wearing*

Extract - Velma: *if I go out stone cold sober, all dressed up (.) I am so self-conscious and I think everybody's lookin' at me (.) but if I've had a few drinks before I go out then its, its fine*

Both Tracey and Velma talk about being 'looked at', and as their language focuses on what they are wearing this suggests that it is their hyper-sexualised appearance that is attracting the gaze. Since both women talk of feeling uncomfortable under the gaze, Tracey feels 'stared at', and Velma feels 'everyone' is looking at her, they drink alcohol beforehand, as a form of compensation, and to overcome their feelings of discomfort. Nonetheless, despite their unease with the attention their appearance is attracting, most of the women talk about how necessary it is that they perform this hyper-hetero-sexy appearance when they go out – to the extent that Amelie says:

Extract – Amelie: *'you have to dress like a slut if you want to go out and I hate that'*

Amelie's statement here highlights just how contradictory, yet dominating this discourse of hyper-sexualised femininity is. She, like many of the women, uses the words 'have to', as

though she has no choice whatsoever. Yet, she associates this hyper-sexualised appearance with looking ‘*like a slut*’, which is not only something she *hates* doing, but is also something most of the women talk about in terms of ‘*other*’ women – certainly not themselves. The power of this discourse can be seen to enable agentic ‘sexiness’, yet contradictorily, at the same time it is disabling, since some women are either unable to perceive their ‘sexy’ selves as ‘good’, as in Amelie’s case, or confine/condemn *other* women’s ‘sexy’ *becomings* as slutty.

Whilst the women talk of their desire to attract male attention, and how alcohol gives them the confidence to do this, they also have specific views on how much alcohol can and cannot be consumed to ensure this attention is favourable. The women interpret male approval based on women’s consumption, as Velma and Boo put it:

- Extract - Velma: *I think girls get really drunk and they’re like ‘Oooh I’m so drunk’ [spoken in a childish voice], and they think they’re gonna get blokes by it, but I don’t think blokes actually (.) like (.) you being that drunk*
- Boo *it’s the opposite (1) if they see a girl that has drunk loads (.) she’s easier*
- Velma *yeh..there’s a fine line like if you’re getting absolutely trashed, and falling over then they’re like (.) easy*
- Boo *but if they’re not drinking at all*
- Velma *then they’re a prude (.) they’re boring*

The women’s discussion above is a clear example of Griffin’s (2005:11) argument: that if they do not drink at all, ‘they have failed as drinkers’, and if they drink *loads* they ‘fail as women’, therefore what spaces are on offer from which to ‘do’ feminine subjectivity in this context?

Whilst in chapter five, some of the women argued that being *soberly drunk* was the answer to this dilemma, here they also point out that they do not want to be seen as *a prude* either. Again they use a discourse of ‘control’ in ensuring they are perceived as ‘good’ women:

- Extract - Velma: *if you’re like single and there’s lots of hot guys then you feel you have to be sort’ve in control*
- Boo *yeh ‘cos I’ve seen girls who act like idiots in front of (.) trying to impress hot guys*
- Interviewer: *so is being in control not drinking too much?*
- Boo *yeh I guess so*
- Twee *knowing your limits yeh*
- Boo & Velma *yeh, yeh*

The women project their perceptions, of male thinking regarding women's drunkenness, onto *other* women by denouncing their behaviour as 'easy', which according to a recent women's magazine blog means sexually promiscuous or 'slutty' (MarieClaire 2010), and by engaging a discourse of control, Velma and Boo ensure they are on the right side of this '*fine line*' that I described in chapter five; in other words, drinking enough alcohol to warrant not being regarded as boring, but limiting their consumption to avoid being regarded as a 'slut'. And although it would seem that a person is either drunk or not drunk, the women talk in terms of 'stages' of drunkenness which define which side of the fine line they will be seen to be:

- Extract - Roxy: *yeh, like I can drink quite a lot, but I always remember everything (.) I would never wake up and say 'How did I get home last night?'*
- Candy *yeh, I've never bin to the point where I can't stand up (.) whereas other girls, they're the exact opposite, every weekend they're out and they can't even walk (.) but they're out on the pull*

These various strategies emphasise how difficult it would appear to be – to consume *a lot* of alcohol and maintain some form of acceptable femininity, particularly since the women's perceptions of male thinking about drinking women is often gleaned from historical, traditional, stereotypic discourses, as I described in chapter five, and which suggest alcohol is a sexual signal and women who drink are more sexually promiscuous (Abbey 2002). As Velma explains when I asked her about 'the look' she liked to maintain when she went out socialising:

- Extract - Velma: *see that's something I get asked about, quizzed about a lot because I go out with (.) a lot of make-up on↓(.) wearing not a lot, well, no, that's not, that's not fair (.) I'll, I'll wear tight clothes and (.) I show off my figure, that's the right way to put it (.) and a lot of blokes take that as 'Yep come on', but I couldn't be further from that (.) it's for me (.) and a lot of people will say 'Oh she's up for it' (.) and that's not the case at all and even a lot of my friends are like 'You get so pissed off when a bloke comes up to you, but you dress like that' (.) so yeh, in some ways, they'll say 'you're asking for it' (.) and that's something that comes up a lot, you know↑, it does bother me*

Velma's talk shows how appearance is closely related to presumptions about her identity; as Tseëlon (1995:122) explains, in her historical analysis of fashion and clothing, appearance "is a dynamic site of struggle for control of the power to define selves and situations" and throughout history clothes have been used to "demarcate lines along social hierarchies and

moral roles” (p.125), for example the respectable woman was distinguished from the non-respectable one. Velma is aware that her appearance is *read* by both men and her friends as her being ‘up for it’ (Gill 2003), or as even ‘*asking for it*’, a discourse in which Velma is assuming the ‘blame’ for dressing provocatively and enticing unwanted sexual advances. Yet as she points out, this is a misconception: *I couldn’t be further from that (.) that’s not the case at all*, rather she says ‘*it’s for me*’. In other words, she wants to feel and look attractive, as necessarily ‘sexually desirable’; something Gill (2007:258) argues is a shift in which women are now presented as active, desiring sexual subjects who *choose* to present themselves in a seemingly objectified manner; and McRobbie (2009) refers to as the ‘post-feminist masquerade’. Yet, as Velma’s talk highlights, in taking up the postfeminist discourse of ‘*just for me*’, it bothers her that ‘just for you’ is still a heterosexual man’s fantasy.

Although research has shown men perceive a woman’s ‘sexualised’ appearance in drinking cultures as sexually promiscuous (Bogren 2006, 2008; Parks and Scheidt 2000), Velma’s narrative suggests some young women concur with this perception and this would warrant further investigation particularly in light of current feminist debates of the sexualisation of culture.

Velma’s account of her friends and that of a number of the young women, discursively constructs a competitiveness amongst females; McRobbie (2004c:100) refers to this competitiveness as part of an increasing individualization in which young post-feminist women, no longer defined in terms of male associations (husbands, fathers, boyfriends) have now ‘been set free to compete with each other, sometimes mercilessly’. As Tracey explains:

Extract - Tracey: *I don’t know what I would do if I didn’t get any attention in a night, and say Esmee did, I would be very jealous. It would (.) knock me completely*

Esmee is Tracey’s ‘best’ friend and current drinking ‘*partner in crime*’ (line: 71), yet despite their ‘close’ friendship and her insistence that they do not compete with each other, she does talk of ‘matching’ the strength of their appearance in terms of attractiveness when they go out:

Extract- Tracey: *we're not competing, we just wanna (.) match levels (.) it's not a competition between us, we just both, understand (.) like I'd help her (.) even if it meant I suddenly felt a bit less attractive 'cos she looks more, and then because I'd feel less, she'd help me (.) until eventually we're on a level ground (.) 'cos you can't have jealousy between friends, so we mutually make each other feel as good as we can before we go out*

So whilst McRobbie (2004c) talks of individualism and young women's disinclination to continue with feminist values of collectivity and equality, we can see a different version of collectivity and equality forming in women's friendships in which competitiveness is underplayed and replaced by words such as '*match levels*' and mutuality.

But, while female approval is sought by all the women a sense of how little female solidarity happens outside of close female friendships is given in Velma's extract below:

Extract - Velma: *If a girl came up to me and said 'You look really good tonight', that would mean a hundred times more than some bloke sayin' that (.) definitely (.) because a bloke will go 'You look fit' or 'Your tits look well good in that', that's what men notice isn't it, if a girl says 'Oh wow your make-up looks really good tonight' or 'Oh my God, have you had your hair done?' That means a lot more to me than (.) a bloke saying that*

Velma talks of male appraisal in terms of how her body is sexually objectified and perceived by male admirers, for example looking '*fit*' and male attention to specific parts of her body, namely her '*tits*' ('fit' is a British slang word for 'sexy' or 'hot', UD 2010). Whilst Velma wants to feel attractive, she wants to be valued as more than a 'sex object', traditionally dressing for an external male judging gaze. She talks of '*if a girl says 'Oh wow your make-up looks really good'*', and it is dressing up for other heterosexual women that she perceives as being '*a hundred times more*' meaningful.

This, I suggest, is a key issue for most of the young women in this study; they discursively construct 'dressing up' as necessary for attracting the male gaze, yet, at the same time, and perhaps even more so, they talk about 'dressing up' for the heterosexual female gaze, which is a contradiction, yet paramount for many of the women. However, whilst the women want to attract the heterosexual female gaze, what is seemingly reflected is not necessarily welcomed. As some of the women explain, it is the 'up and down' gaze they receive from *other* women which can be particularly antagonistic.

6.3.2 The 'Up and Down' look

The heterosexual female gaze is often interpreted as varying between approval and disdain; for example, in a group discussion, the young women assimilated the female gaze with class:

- Extract - Candy: *some of the girls can turn a bit (.) snobby (.) a lot of the girls in XXXX think they are*
-Roxy: *yeh there are some that are friendly and social (.) but you do get some that*
-Candy: *that are like (.) eyeing you up*
-Roxy: *yeh looking you up and down yeh (.) like just to see what you're wearing*

Whilst Candy does not explain why she thinks the girls that look her 'up and down' are 'snobby' it would seem that she is tacitly aware of what Hooks (2003) calls the 'critical gaze' – a "look" that is intent on interpreting and punishing and is carried out by *other* women looking through 'class-biased spectacles' (Plummer 2000:47). Velma, Boo and Twee offer further reiteration during their group discussion:

- Extract - Twee: *yeh it's the way they act*
-Velma: *the way they act (.) definitely and like (.) the look*
-Twee: *yeh the look (.) when you walk past yeh (.) the up and down look*
[laugh]

Within the women's accounts of the heterosexual female gaze, they also talk about looks they get as: '*they are girls that you think "You're looking for a fight"*' (Velma, line: 1276). These looks can be interpreted as a form of implicit aggression, as though these '*girls*' are looking in some 'evil' way, as Dora puts it:

- Extract - Dora: *it's just like the way they look at you (.) like the 'evils' and that (.) I don't know, girls get jealous don't they↑ (.) of other girls, if they're prettier than them or whatever*

In Day, Gough and McFadden's (2003) study, examining women's talk around aggression in the context of 'nights out', they argue that physical aggression plays an important role in the construction of (some) working-class femininities (that 'make sense' in local classed contexts), whilst their middle-class participants engaged in a more 'indirect' form of

aggression, such as 'bitching' and 'gossiping' (Owens, Shute, and Slee 2000). Yet Terry equates 'bitchiness' as similar to male indirect aggression:

Extract - Terry: *you get really bitchy girls that glare each other up and down (.) 'cos to sort've, you know, check out what they're wearing kind've thing and like (.) almost a bit how guys do (.) they sort've square up to each other, that's with loads of girls though (.) you know, 'I don't like what you're wearin' sort've thing (.) giving you a dirty look*

Terry's talk of 'sort've (.) check out what they're wearing', comparing it to the way men often 'square up to each other', might be a means of appraisal and intrasexual competition (Benson and Archer 2002). However, it also suggests a kind of insidious and partially invisible symbolic violence as a mode of domination which acts upon the women as a form of 'policing'. A number of feminists have written about the ways in which women feel they have to be constantly aware of their environment, 'policing' men's behaviour in trying to predict their motives and actions (Kelly 1988; Radford 1987). Yet, in drawing on Foucault's work, we can see how the 'observing (female) gaze' is a form of 'symbolic violence' (McRobbie 2004c) that disciplines through surveillance; it may be masked by being non-verbal, but it is sustained because it has a collective complicity - 'loads of girls (.) giving you a dirty look'. Furthermore, the power of this form of symbolic violence is in its lack of 'visibility' (McRobbie 2004c); in other words, it leaves Terry with doubts and fears about her own subjectivity, she 'misrecognises' their glares and looks as acts of domination, interpreting them as signs of her own 'failing'. This sense that *other* women's 'looks' (or gazes) can 'make' or 'break' you is constant in the young women's talk, and in regarding the 'gaze' as very important, it dominates the space in which young women's experience 'going out' drinking.

Nonetheless, there are differences in the young women's talk; for example, for some, women are *bitchier*, whilst for others it's orientated towards class, or maturity:

Extract - Posh: *I actually prefer to hang around with my XXXX girls than I do the XXXX girls↓, particularly as there's no bitchin' (.) there's no 'She said, and she said' and all that (.) they're just out for a good time and respect each other (.) I'm not in the playground anymore (.) and I want to go out and have a good time and be adult about things and I get that from that group of friends, I don't get it from that group (.) yet they're all the same age*

Extract - Summer: *that's probably the reason why I'm not friends with many girls↑, because I can't stand the bitchiness (.) they're all really bitchy (.) I just can't be bovvered with it (.) it's like being back in school*

Posh and Summer both talk about *other* women using a maturity discourse, expressing how, unlike some *other* women their age, they are '*not in the playground anymore*' and '*want to be an adult*', rather than *bitchin'* which they associate with '*being back in school*'. Additionally, in their talk, there is also the sense that there is a space, or opportunity, for escape – to be different.

Furthermore, Vaillancourt and Sharma's (2011) study reported women reacting negatively ('bitchy') in response to attractive women who dress in a sexually provocative manner, and their findings are evidenced in Posh's talk of intrasexual competition among young women:

Extract- Posh: *I think girls can do more damage than a bloke can, to you, to your confidence (.) like a bloke, if they don't like you, they don't like you and they can jog on, I don't care (.) but girls, they have (.) there's, it's a different (.) form of (.) attack in a way (.) it is competition at the end of the day (.) another woman in the room is competition for you↑, with all the men out there, and you wanna be, I don't know, it's just, it's on what's she's got on, it's horrible. You don't kind've get ready to look good for a bloke anymore (.) you kind've get ready to look the best, and you don't want that girl over the other side of the room lookin' better than you and wannin' to slag your outfit off*

And again, here we can see a sense of symbolic violence at work with the female gaze potentially '*damaging*' Posh's confidence, making it necessary for her to look '*the best*' in order to avoid any denigrating remarks ('*slag your outfit off*') or be misrecognised. Posh talks explicitly about *other* women being in competition with her, and this may be intrasexual competition for the male gaze. However, I suggest it is also it is an example of a contradictory discourse of intrasexual competition for the heterosexual female gaze.

6.4 “*I just wore my flats (1) and I felt incredibly small and unsexy and not (.) very feminine*”

During the course of the interviews the women talked of the repercussions they incur if they make a mistake, or fashion faux-pas, which have consequences such as feeling a ‘loss’ of femininity:

Extract - Terry: *I had quite a short dress on so thought I’m not gonna wear high heels because it would look too over the top, so I just wore my flats (1) I noticed how every single girl was wearing high heels and suddenly I felt incredibly small and (.) unsexy (.) and not, you know, very feminine*

Terry talks about wearing ‘flats’ as opposed to ‘high heels’ with her ‘short dress’ in order not to look ‘over the top’; and McRobbie (2007:726) might argue that Terry is ‘abiding by ‘The Rules’ in sexual decorum’ in her decision-making. However, her narrative also highlights how inescapable the hyper-sexualised ‘look’ is for young women when they go out. As she explains, ‘every single girl’ was wearing high heels and in wearing flat shoes, Terry felt ‘unsexy’ as though her definition of femininity is ‘sexiness’ and to feel ‘sexy’ means wearing heels. Sexy is also endorsed by being seen, and heels provide height in the *contest* to live the gaze.

However, contradictorily, the height of a female can also constrain what she wears on her feet since Terry talks of her friends who do wear flat shoes because they are ‘*incredibly tall*’ and she assumes ‘*they might feel that they’re almost overpowering and slightly unfeminine if they’re taller than half the blokes*’ (line: 858). So, it would seem, these discourses of femininity can only be practiced by a woman of a certain height to ensure she is not considered de-feminised by her physique and seen to be ‘overpowering’ men (with its implications of what femininity is, for example, subservient, weaker and less dominant).

In terms of a ‘loss’ of femininity, further consequences are incurred as a result of performing this hyper-sexualised ‘look’. Most of the women talk about high heels being a necessary part of this identity, for example:

Extract - Dora: *yeh high heels are very important (.) I think it’s all about look (.) feminism (.) its high heels*

Extract - Lexie: *I find you can wear (.) a black dress, black tights, but the shoes, I, ’cos I like (.) like the shoes can completely change the outfit (.) it all starts from the shoes*

Heels are important to such an extent that Lexie implies that what she decides to wear is determined by her shoes. When I asked Dora what 'feminism' meant to her, she represented it as '*high heels [laugh], skirts, dresses (.) looking nice*' (line: 769). This is surprising since high-heeled shoes were once regarded as symbolic of women's sexual objectification, yet now, it would seem they have become emblematic of a confident, powerful femininity (Jackson and Scott 2004). As Gill (2008a:37) puts it, 'stiletto heels..have acquired a particular symbolic potency in this postfeminist moment', and in drawing our attention to the fact that they are often difficult to walk in, and painful, Gill (2008a:37) suggests that sexual attractiveness is now valued 'over and above freedom of movement'. Support for Gill's observation is found in the women's talk, and particularly when alcohol is involved. As some of the women point out, the combination of high-heeled shoes and alcohol can often be precarious:

- Extract - India: *They [high-heeled shoes] are dangerous though (.) I fell over, on Saturday, look at all my war wounds, that's the first one, and my ankle here was swollen [shows the interviewer the bruises on her legs]*
- Lipsy: *They are, they're very dangerous*
- Mouse: *And they hurt your feet*
- Lexie: *yeh like I fell down the stairs in XXXX (.) that's what I don't like (.) the unidentified drinking injuries, although I know it's my shoes*
- India: *yeh and I can't bend down in those shoes*
- Lipsy: *to be fair India you do wear the highest heels I have ever seen*

Thus, whilst heels are important, the women admit wearing them is hard work since the sheer height of the heel means they are often dangerous and uncomfortable and result in injury, particularly when they are drunk. When I asked Summer if she had particular ways of doing things that she regarded as feminine, she described her 'killer' heels:

- Extract - Summer: *I wore them out last night and they're so fucking high, the front of 'em's like two inch, like two inch platform at the front and the back's like a five or six inch heel and when I started feeling a little bit drunk I couldn't walk in them, even more (.) I couldn't walk in 'em (.) very well anyway (1) but I like the (.) really high ones (.) that kill my feet [laugh] (.) that's when I'd say I'm more feminine*

Summer acknowledges her shoes are impossible to walk in, and even more so once she becomes '*a little bit drunk*', yet as Gill (2008a) suggests, Summer's desire to look sexually attractive, which she interprets as being '*more feminine*', outweighs the excruciating pain ('*kill my feet*') she suffers in wearing them. Contradictorily, and certainly in the minority,

Amelie does not wear high-heeled shoes on 'nights out'. But unlike the other women who accept the injuries and perhaps embarrassment as a result of wearing stilettos and falling over as an occupational hazard, Amelie uses this as a disclaimer for wearing flat shoes:

Extract - Amelie: *I just wear flats (.) I hardly ever wear heels anymore because there's no point, I can't even walk in them [laugh] I just fall over, the other day I actually fell flat on my face, everyone saw (.) I've never been so embarrassed in my entire life (.) so there is no point, I mean they do look nice, but I don't wanna go through that pain*

Amelie's sense of pain regarding the wearing of high-heels is not a physical one, rather she talks of the psychological pain of embarrassment she suffered in that 'everyone saw' when she fell over and this serves too painful a reminder to attempt wearing them again. She resigns herself to wearing flats herself by saying that *there's no point* in wearing high-heels as she 'can't even walk in them', as though she is an exception and that other women can. But this feeling of exclusion is possibly endorsed by Terry's observation that whenever she does goes out, every single girl is wearing high-heels, and Amelie says she cannot wear them since falling over proved that; Amelie is not a 'feminist' against pain, rather she just accepts her limitations after feeling humiliated.

There is a considerable amount of preparation in achieving the 'look' of hyper-hetero-sexy femininity; a feminine 'look' that, it would seem, can only be achieved by undertaking certain 'technologies of sexiness'. Furthermore, these technologies are dominating one, since Posh points out, looking '*natural is a mess darling*' (line:583). The necessary preparations for looking sexually attractive often '*kind of starts the night before*' (Tracey,line:351) 'going out'. As Sienna elaborates:

Extract - Sienna: *everything (.) from head to toe, and like, you know (.) skin like (.) so many are wearing fake tan now[↑], its everything, every little aspect (.) your body from sort've head to toe, it will (.) get judged*

In her use of words such as '*every little aspect*' and '*everything*', Sienna tacitly draws from McRobbie's statement in highlighting that everything about a woman's appearance must be attended to, since, like the mechanism of the panopticon, she is under the all-seeing gaze and her body will be judged. Posh talks about how the female body is '*attacked*' by advertisers in their focus on thinness as the idealised norm, and in suggesting that as 'appearance' is all women care about, she says that in idealising thinness it '*imprisons them* [girls and women] *for life*' (line:416-9). Posh's observation highlights the potential damaging ways in which the power of the 'gaze', and also the 'image', work '*in and through subjects*'

(Harvey and Gill 2011:55). As I explained earlier in this chapter, Harvey and Gill (2011:57), like Coleman (2008), talk of bodies as not being separate to images, but rather '*becoming* known, understood and experienced through images'. Drawing on this concept, I think Posh's narrative is an example of how images limit (and extend) women's bodies and subjectivities.

Additionally, Velma points out, the impact of drinking heavily also impacts on how a woman appears:

Extract - Velma: *like every night everyone was out, plastered, and we did it for three nights and then we were like 'Oh my God we look awful' (.) like our skin was awful, everything just looked knackered (.) so we had a night off*

Velma's concern about the physical effects of too much alcohol was not on the potential unseen damage to her body, but on the visual effect it had on her skin in making her '*look knackered*', and therefore sexually unattractive. Whilst her resolve, to correct this effect, was to have '*a night off*' from drinking, and this course of action would be regarded as redeemable by alcohol policy makers, it is not for the same reasons. The UK's Department of Health *Sensible Drinking* (DoH 1995) guidelines were supplemented with the advice that 'after an episode of heavy drinking, it is advisable to refrain from drinking for 48 hours to allow tissues to recover', for the purpose of helping combat body organ damage such as liver disease. Although the Government and The Portman Group both ran campaigns targeted at tackling binge-drinking among women by appealing to their vanity, these were either deemed unrealistic or had not been seen by the participants.

A relaxation in the women's routine participation in the 'culture of intoxication' does not however, mean a relaxation in their necessary attendance to their appearance. And checking every detail remains constant since any slip will be noticed:

Extract - Tracey: *you've got to maintain a certain um appearance (.) we don't like being overlooked (.) so w:e keep a level up of ourselves and if that dips then it gets very noticed very quickly, so you can't risk that. You have to think about everything*

Tracey says she has '*got*' to maintain a certain standard with regard to her appearance, and thus her sexual attractiveness, and this means she must '*think about everything*' to ensure she receives the attention she needs – attention which confirms that her 'look' is valued and that she is 'doing it right'. As Gill (2007a:149) points out, "women's bodies are evaluated,

scrutinized and dissected by women (as well as men), and are always at risk of 'failing'", and this is something Tracey is aware of, as she says, any '*dip*' in her immaculate appearance because it will be '*very noticed very quickly*' and she *can't risk that*'.

Sienna also accounts for the hard work involved in getting ready to go out as something women undertake because they know that any 'failure' will be noticed, and going back to Sienna's quote earlier:

Extract - Sienna: *girls I think are constantly (.) looking more so at other girls than they would at even (.) at blokes. Like constantly judging other people against themselves (.) and that's why girls are more and more are spending so much more time, you know, in getting ready, and you know, all the hair extensions and all the (.) fake everything and loads of make-up and (.) loads of different outfits that you can wear (.) It's all to sort've (.) look better than the next girl*

Sienna's talk supports the idea of intrasexual competition, together with Gill's emphasis on the intense scrutiny women are under to get their appearance 'right' or be judged as a 'failure'. Her narrative also underlines the hard work involved in trying to achieve a self-perfectability (McRobbie 2009:63). Furthermore, within a framework of postfeminism, consumer culture has actively generated bodily dissatisfaction; a dissatisfaction that has resulted in women's increased use of what Sienna refers to as '*fake everything*' as a way of making up for any loss or failing they sense, through the female gaze, in terms of their own bodies and that of the competition ('*the next girl*').

Yet, as Velma points out, the time she spends over getting ready to go out does not necessarily ensure attention:

Extract - Velma: *'cos you [addressing her friend Boo] like say to me on the phone "Velma you just spent an hour doing that [attending to her appearance], you don't look any different" (.) but it's me, if I don't feel right I don't wanna go out (.) and that's why I like walking in the pub (.) like as soon as you get out, you wanna see everybody straight away and like, 'Oh hello' (.) and then it's ok, its fine (.) then↓*

Like Tracey earlier in this chapter, Velma does not want to be overlooked and actively seeks attention as soon as she is 'out'; she wants to '*see everybody straightaway*' and make contact because this reassures her sense of self as 'attractive', and that, like Tracey, she is '*doing it right*'. Yet as Boo, her friend, points out, despite the lengths Velma goes to, in terms of hard work and time, trying to ensure she will be noticed (perhaps for some form of

authenticity or originality), these are not realisable since she does not *'look any different'*. Velma's answer to this paradox is that she has to *'feel right'* otherwise she will not want to go out, in other words, the requirement to participate in sexual subjectivity, effectively created by discourses of postfeminism, is inescapable and policed; and is something that Velma is, like most of the young women in this study, painfully aware of.

6.5 Summary

The women's identities, it would seem, rely on being looked at; they talk of feeling 'good' by being watched, and not just in the sense that they feel attractive and desirable 'under the male gaze'. In the young women's accounts there are discourses around how important the 'heterosexual female gaze' is, perhaps even more so than the male gaze, particularly in recognising and confirming their sense of self as sexy feminine subjects. However, the 'female gaze' acts like a mirror, working very much like Foucault's panopticon, in which the women internalise their gaze as a reflection of themselves. The female gaze, or look of appraisal, has the power to 'make' or 'break' you; and whilst the women 'freely choose' to undertake 'technologies of sexiness' in constructing their supposedly agentic sexy identity, this freedom is constrained, amongst many things, by their positioning as working-class women. Being working-class women, their sense of selves as 'good' women involves looking respectable and being 'in control', whilst also managing to look 'sexy'. Whilst the women's talk suggests that this hyper-hetero-sexy look is inexorable, and they must self-objectify themselves for the male gaze, at the same time, they must also deny their own sexual subjectivity or be labelled a slut. Inevitably, it would seem, you can be one thing or the other (object or subject) but not both. Certainly, for most of the women in this study, the female gaze, which they partly interpret as female intrasexual competition, means hard work in achieving and maintaining this idealised form of femininity; a 'look' which is also dominant in drinking cultures.

In making sense of this postfeminist identity, the young women describe how, for them, it is inescapable, and 'bringing into being', using 'technologies of sexiness' (Evans, Riley, and Shankar 2010), requires not only agency, but dedication too. However, their experiences of becoming sexy, independent, and 'empowered' also reveal just how very isolated and brutal a space it is to be in.

Chapter Seven: *Alcohol as Provocateur: pleasures and pains of hetero-hyper-sexual femininity*

7.1 Introduction

Chapter six explored how the participants constructed ‘new’ femininities within a context of neo-liberal postfeminist times, and how they are expected to enact a hyper-sexualised feminine ‘look’ on ‘nights out’. In this chapter, I show how some young women constitute the possession of a ‘sexy’ body as a key source of power, and empowerment is in their ability to attract male attention and female envy. However, for many of the young women in this study, constructing this identity is difficult, since it often requires confidence and/or a desire to present oneself as a ‘knowing sexual entrepreneur’; as Amelie states, *‘you have to dress like a slut and I hate that’*. In a neoliberal context in which women’s engagement in new sexual subjectivities and excessive drinking is constructed through postfeminist discourses of choice and equality, tensions thus arise between the prescriptive aspects of new sexual subjectivities and the construction of participation within them as choiceful and pleasurable – summarised by one of my participants as girls *‘just gotta have fun’*. In this chapter I use Foucault’s theory of bio-power to extend Gill’s (2009d) theorising on sexual subjectification, to show how the women make sense of sexual subjectivities in the NTE context, and how discourses of power and pleasure operate through the construction of particular subjectivities.

7.2 Negotiating the conditions of the ‘new heterosexual, desiring sexual subject’ in drinking contexts

In describing their participation for ‘going out drinking’ the young women were keen to express that ‘it was all in the preparation’; getting ready involved drinking alcohol, but as discussed in chapters five and six, it was primarily about achieving a particular ‘look’, with alcohol acting as an ‘inciting’ or ‘provocative agent’. The women talked about how drinking while getting ‘ready’ gave them the confidence to wear hyper-feminine outfits that were ‘sexy’ and revealing.

7.2.1 Alcohol as “agent provocateur”: the key to ‘being noticed’

Giving ‘confidence’ as their main reason for consuming alcohol, the women’s narratives support the findings of previous research; for example, alcohol-induced confidence and its

various synonyms (e.g., social facilitation) was reported in both Pavis, Cunningham-Burley and Amos's (1997) work, and Sheehan and Ridge's (2001) study with young women. And among the many reasons for drinking alcohol, women have said it helps alleviate low self-esteem and self-image (Kuntsche, Rhem, and Gmel 2004). Studies often point out this reasoning, however there seems to be little, if any, exploration of why young women give confidence and esteem boosting as their reasons for drinking.

In my study all the women gave 'confidence' as one of their reasons for drinking. Esmee talked of *'when you're drunk it brings out so much more confidence (.) so I think confidence is pretty much high up there as a reason for women drinking a lot'*. When I asked Esmee why she thought women wanted so *much more confidence* when they go out, she immediately replied, *'to be noticed'*:

Extract – Esmee: *getting attention[↑], I like my attention, Tracey does as well, like coming home and saying 'Did you see that guy staring at us, he loved it didn't he' (.) but gettin' attention is successful (.) but you need to be confident to get attention (2) that's why women drink*

Esmee's view, shared by a number of the women, is 'getting attention' and seeking attention for the 'right' reasons. And the women explain how they use a set of practices to get the attention they particularly want, including what to drink and where, what to wear, and how to behave. For them, getting the 'right' attention is an indication that their *performance*, in the public eye, is successful:

Extract – Terry: *they wouldn't wanna see their friends, sort've staggering around looking, you know, like dress hanging down and looking terrible (.) I think it depends on the way you act when you're very drunk (.) I mean I don't want to give the wrong impression to people, and if I fall over because I'm too drunk, that would be really embarrassing to me (.) and if I was trying to attract someone I wouldn't (.) get that drunk (.) you kind've run it though in your head a lot, you're more anxious about it (1) but alcohol does provide (.) gives them something that makes them want to be out there, to be noticed (.) it's difficult because if you're kind've shy you don't really wanna go and dance in case you (.) make a tit of yourself [laugh], but if you've been drinking you just get up and like (.) strut your stuff on the dance floor for everyone to see*

Terry's narrative reveals the dilemma some women have in getting their 'look' right and seeking the 'right' attention; women do not want to be remembered for looking too drunk, and the obvious signs are neglecting to constantly monitor yourself and letting your dress

slip revealingly, *staggering around or falling over*. On the other hand, *to be noticed* often means positioning yourself somewhere where everyone can see you, and often this means the dance floor. The dance floor becomes a form of ‘*catwalk*’, as I described in earlier chapters, where the young women can *strut their stuff*. Yet, as Terry’s narrative highlights, for some young women, putting themselves in the very public position and under the public spotlight, is daunting and to overcome the contradiction of wanting to be noticed, yet not be noticed (e.g., because you are shy) they drink alcohol.

Thus, alcohol acts as an *agent provocateur* for these practices; an inciter for seeking attention by ‘giving’ the women the confidence they feel they need to dress and behave in particular ways that have the desired effect – the ‘gaze’:

Extract – Tracey: *we had a couple of bottles of wine while we were getting ready (.) ’cos people do need that too (.) especially if you’re going out in like Anne Summers outfits (.) you need a couple of drinks to get the confidence to wear things like that (2) but we sexed the outfits up a bit and got most of them from Anne Summers (.) and wore like stockings and suspender belts and stuff with them. So of course a load of girls in suspender belts and that gettin’ on this train, we got stared at quite a lot (.) I was drinking on the way there though (.) alcohol helps me feel confident about what I was wearing. Esmee was wearing basically hot pant short like girl’s boxers, but they were small so her butt cheeks were showing and everything*

Tracey talks about drinking alcohol to enable her to feel confident about wearing Anne Summers outfits when she goes out. Aware that she and her friends are attracting attention, their outfits consist of mostly lingerie, items such as stockings, suspenders and ‘girl’s boxers’ which women usually wear in ‘private’ and do not display. However, the purpose of these outfits is to represent ‘sexiness’ and to get attention, and conversations about what the young women might wear on a night out, such as Tracey’s above, were often whispered or accompanied by giggling, as if they were doing something ‘illicit’ or that their provocative outfits are somehow ‘bad’. Tracey talks about her ‘Anne Summers’ outfits as ‘*things like that*’, which orients to a sexual subtext without being overtly expressed as such; and lingerie, marketed by manufacturers such as Anne Summers and Agent Provocateur, is exclusively designed to do just that – to be tacitly suggestive (and not to be worn in public).

Lingerie is often promoted to women as a fashion statement, inviting them ‘to become a particular kind of self, and endowed with agency on condition that it is used to construct oneself as a subject closely resembling the heterosexual male fantasy that is found in

pornography' (Gill 2007a:152). However, as Storr (2002:18) points out, whilst lingerie is invested with meanings of femininity, sexuality and pleasure, these meanings are often ambiguous and multi-layered. She explains how binary pairings such as sleaze and respectability, public and private, display and concealment, are often interwoven with connotations of judgement and class (Storr 2002:29). Furthermore, there are the dangers in presenting women as exuding 'traffic-stopping sexiness' (often found in lingerie adverts) in a culture in which sexual violence is widespread. And, only *some* women are constructed as active, desiring sexual subjects; it is an exclusionary representational practice for heterosexual, young, slim and beautiful women only (Gill 2007a:152). What this study suggests is that to successfully perform an image of confident, hetero-hyper-sexy femininity in public is one thing, but it often has little to do with how these young women feel inside; any issues such as vulnerability and/or lack of self-esteem are often suffered silently for fear of 'failing' in some way, or masked through alcohol consumption as a means of overcoming such felt 'shortfalls'.

It is within this context, of performing hyper-sexualised femininity, and coupled with the young women's use of alcohol, that I adopt the manufacturer's label here in presenting alcohol as '*Agent Provocateur*'. The company, marketing the brand '*Agent Provocateur*', uses words such as seductive in promoting their product', and their website is described as targeting a particular type of woman: 'a woman who chooses to wear their lingerie is gorgeous and confident – a natural *femme fatale*' (Shotton 2011). In other words, the idea they sell to women is that lingerie equals confidence, and, it would seem, this is a discourse that young women take up and make their own. However, as Tracey explains, in order to feel the confidence promised by wearing such lingerie, she first needs to feel confident about putting the outfit on in the first place and this, for her, means drinking alcohol. Tracey, for example, explains that she has '*to look confident before I can act it*' therefore her appearance is key; however, in order to '*look confident*' Tracey says she '*needs a couple of drinks*'.

Alcohol not only acts as '*agent provocateur*', but in consuming alcohol women also become what Thompson (2001) describes as '*agent provocateuse*'. Alcohol is the provocateur in perhaps 'making trouble', yet it also provides the women with the confidence to '*become visible*', so, in effect the women become facilitators of trouble. In other words, women who drink excessively are 'sabotaging civility, by practicing a kind of civil disobedience' (Thompson 2001:89). As Lipsy points out during a group discussion:

Extract - Lipsy: *we go out to get pissed at the weekends (2) we should be allowed exactly the same as them [men], we work like them (.) we have to pay the same tax as them so (.) why we are not allowed to get (.) as pissed as them (.) again that's like the stereotype thing (.) like girls are supposed to be girls and not have any fun (1) just because we drink beer, or we're loud or we do shots or we get drunk (.) that is what girls should be allowed to do which should be (.) a girl's thing. It's the same thing with sex (.) men are good and their friends think they're good, if they sleep with everyone, yet if a girl does it its bad (.) why?*

In her narrative, Lipsy talks about a number of issues which negate Plant and Plant's (2006:44) assertion that the double standard surrounding British women's heavy drinking has been eroded. Lipsy wants to see a reversal of the standard – that getting drunk is traditionally a male pastime (Parks et al. 1998; Eldridge and Roberts 2008), in suggesting that getting drunk '*should be a girl's thing*' she compares drinking with sex, drawing on discourses which normalise the denial of women's desire and sexual subjectivity. Lipsy also argues, using a second-wave feminist equality (and economic) discourse, that '*we [women] pay the same tax as*' men, therefore young women should have the same equality both socially and culturally as men. As she says, doing girl as its '*supposed to be*' done means not having '*any fun*', because fun to her means being able to '*get pissed*' and have sex if she wants to. Nonetheless, Lipsy has to negotiate her way through what Ussher (1997:13) refers to as a complex array of scripts of femininity which produce multiple meanings, containing contradictions and inconsistencies. For example, getting drunk and having random sex both invoke the patriarchal double standard that has separated the sexually passive good girl from the sexually active bad girl, yet the latter has become synonymous with 'girl power' in presenting them both as iconic forms of popularised postfeminism (Munford 2004).

7.2.2 “After seven drinks I feel like (.) Kate Moss”

As discussed confidence is a key issue in motivating the young women to drink alcohol. The concept of Girl Power constructs and instructs young women today as a 'unique category of girls' who are and should be confident and assertive (Harris 2004b), yet it is this concept, which in illustrating the ways in which new modes of young femininity is bound up with success, that becomes a source of anxiety for many women. As Jackson (2006) explains, the fashion pages, beauty pages, articles and advertisements in women's magazines, construct Girl Power as the sassy, smart girl who knows what she wants (sexually) and how to get it. Yet beneath the self assurance, not only are these “new” sexual femininities,

re/produced in the magazine pages, contradictory, unstable, fragile, and readily “undone” (Jackson 2006:473, citing Jackson, 2005; Ussher, 1997), but are underscored by normative ideals of middle-class femininity and ‘personify an anxiety about [and in] those who are [supposedly] unsuccessful in producing themselves in this way’ (Gonick 2006:2).

A way in which young women are often portrayed as ‘failing’ in the discourses of ‘girl power’ is in their construction as women who have strayed from the marketed path of success; in other words, some women are identified as having “disordered” patterns of consumption (Griffin 1997) and are often portrayed as the new ‘risk-takers’ (Harris 2004b)²³. Yet few of my participants regard themselves as risk-takers, since not getting drunk is inconceivable because it is ‘*boring*’ and ‘*prudish*’ (Velma, FG, lines: 1467-9), and occurs in a context in which excessive drinking is ‘*routine*’ and ‘*what everyone does*’ (Terry, lines: 380-1). So that one dilemma, apparent in the young women’s narratives here, is that many of them talk repeatedly about alcohol providing them with the confidence they need to take up discourses of ‘girl power’ that at the same time position them as potentially problematic consumers because of their drinking.

Because the commercial domain (beauty, fashion, magazines, body culture, etc.) is now so dominant for many young women (including my participants), young women are required to participate in the fashion-beauty complex in their attempts to *become* a specific kind of female subject (McRobbie 2009). My analysis also supports McRobbie’s assertion that this fashion-beauty prescription often results in female vulnerability, uncertainty and deep anxiety. Alcohol, however, often temporarily relieves the pressure some young women feel, and their sense of failing in some way to meet the criteria for this all consuming and narrow ideals of hyper-sexualised femininity (e.g., Sienna’s talk of drinking alcohol in order to stop *caring*, p.180). As Kilbourne (1995) noted, women are urged to view themselves as never looking ‘good enough’ with ‘one of the biggest weapons the media uses is the fear of fat’ (*Slim Hopes*, 1995); a view shared by Halliwell, Malson and Tischner (2011) in finding an increased weight-concern amongst those women who view more sexually agentic representations in advertisements. An example of this can be seen in Velma’s talk about her friend Boo, who, Velma explains, drinks excessively to *boost her self-esteem* because she is *a big girl*. Velma also slips into talking about her own confidence and how alcohol enables her to temporarily forget about the strict role the fashion-beauty complex plays in regulating young women:

²³ See also Risk-Takers (Plant and Plant 1992)

Extract –Velma: *a lot of it is self-esteem (.) a lot of it, and this is going to sound really horrible and I love her to pieces and I don't want you to think I'm a cow (.) but (.) Boo is (.) a, a big girl, she's a big, I mean she's gorgeous, don't get me wrong, she's gorgeous, but she's a big girl and (.) when she goes out with, when we're all I' ready together and that, she feels bigger, and it's almost like (.) she's got a point to prove (.) that "Yeh I can pull" and "Oh yeh he thinks I'm hot" (1) this is something Boo said when we were in XXX, she said "After seven drinks I feel like (.) Kate Moss" (.) she said "I'm not fat anymore" (.) she was like (.) "I'm", you know, "I'm gorgeous, after that amount of drink (.) I can talk to anybody" (.) and that's (.) it's, it's true, you do feel a lot (.) prettier I suppose (.) like you spend two hours getting ready to go out, and you're so worried that your mascara's perfect and your hair's perfect blah, blah, blah (.) and after about an hour or so [laugh] of drinkin' you don't care (.) so you do, you do get a lot more confident definitely (.) I, I do anyway*

Velma's narrative illustrates how alcohol allows you to participate in, and experience, 'ideal' female subjectivity, in part because it allows them to stop worrying about meeting perfection ideals. Velma discusses her friend Boo's experiences of participating in going out while being a '*big girl*', drawing on culturally normative notions that devalue fat women (Gill 2003; Kent 2001), which she evokes and then disclaims, before explaining that drinking alcohol allows Boo to feel like '*Kate Moss*', an internationally known very slim supermodel (Cortese 1999). According to Velma, in being intoxicated Boo feels *gorgeous*; this suggests Boo believes that being 'fat' is unattractive, and supports Markula's (2001:238) argument that 'women are expected to be thin to be considered attractive and accepted in this society'. Velma's talk also suggests that in being a 'big girl' Boo is not understood as sexually attractive, and to resist this positioning she uses alcohol to give her confidence to 'pull' men.

For Velma and Boo (according to Velma) alcohol allows them to feel *gorgeous* or *prettier*; it allows them, temporarily, to 'take up' ideal female subject positions that render them sexy, attractive, and slim. This in turn, enables Velma and Boo to relax in their attendance to detail, such as worrying that their '*mascara's perfect*' and their '*hair's perfect*' because, in consuming '*seven drinks*', the alcohol makes 'trouble' (*agent provocateur*), disrupting Boo's poor self-image and enabling her to feel like '*Kate Moss*' and not to care.

7.3 'Bar-lesque'

As '*agent provocateur*' alcohol provides the women with the confidence to perform a hyper-sexualised mode of femininity, but it is the venues within the night-time economy that become the spaces for 'visibility' and recognition. The performance of hyper-sexualised femininity can be understood as problematic, an internalisation of the 'objectifying male gaze' in order to be recognised as 'sexually desirable'; yet drinking spaces also provide young women with opportunities to negotiate positions of power as female subjects. These spaces I refer to as the '*bar-lesque*', a variation of neo-burlesque coupled with the idea of drinking spaces, namely the bar, in which women produce spectacular, yet often alternative ways of 'doing' femininities in public spaces.

The emergence of burlesque in the late 1990s revived an earlier tradition of 'erotic performance', combining of 'satire and sexiness' (Willson 2008:38) (for historical analysis of burlesque see Allen (1991) and Nally (2009)). As Attwood (2011:206) notes, in its current incarnation, (neo-) burlesque has 'been seen as representing fertile ground for playing with the norms and ideals of sexy femininity', which can be understood as a fluid and multifaceted phenomenon accommodating 'multiple versions of what women are' (Nally 2009:631), so that rather than (mis)reading it as a 'reproduction of normative heterosexuality...it accounts for women's lived experiences of femininity' (Ferreday 2008:53;61).

Similarly, I suggest that drinking venues in the NTE provide a space for women not just to 'play' with the ideals of a hyper-sexualised femininity, as Attwood suggests, but also to transgress conventional ideas on how a woman should behave in public; thus, for some women, drinking venues offer a '*bar-lesque*' site of parody and resistance.

The intense pressure regarding appearance that the participants describe (see, for example, chapter 6) does not, however, stop all women from enjoying themselves. See for example, below in a friendship group discussion in which I asked the women how they felt about the suggestion that women who get drunk might be regarded as unfeminine and deemed 'ladettes':

Extract - Lexie:	<i>Shut up!</i>
-Mouse:	<i>Not true!</i>
-Lipsy:	<i>That's rubbish I think</i>
-Lexie:	<i>we're girls, and we like doing our make-up and we like looking nice, you know, nice dress (.) but we're not like (.) ladettes</i>
-Lipsy:	<i>why should we be called that just because we go out and get pissed (.) you like to dress up (.) I <u>love</u> dressing up (.) going out with loads of make-up on</i>

- Lexie: *and we're loud and talk about sex, and use the language (.) like, I think it's not what is expected of girls (.) whereas (.) there's nothing wrong with it (.) and we're not ashamed of it*
- India: *I think we're the good (.) time girls, I mean we go out to have a good time*

The women say they like getting '*pissed*' but use the disclaimer '*we're not like ladettes, why should we be called that*' which suggests they have to consider this label. Lexie also implicitly acknowledges that, traditionally, women in public were expected to behave in a particular way – '*what is expected of girls*', and this did not include being '*loud and talking about sex*'.

However, the women strongly defend their position as '*good time girls*', and feel empowered to enjoy themselves. They express the pleasure they get in going out, as Lipsy says '*I love dressing up*' which often means wearing high-heeled shoes, '*loads of make-up*', and '*nice*' dresses. And, similarly, Velma talks about the sequence of pleasurable practices she goes through in preparation for 'going out':

- Extract - Velma: *to get really dressed up at the weekend, I love doing that (.) I think it's a big part of going out (.) it all starts at 5 o'clock, you finish work, you go to your friend's house, you get ready, like you have drinks, that's how it all starts (.) you get ready, and then you go out*

Like Lipsy, Velma also '*loves*' getting '*really dressed up*' and in her narrative you get a real sense that, after a week at work, she really looks forward to the 'start' of a night out – going to her friend's house, drinking and getting '*ready*'. As India says, '*we*' [the female group of friends], '*go out to have a good time*', and often it is the all-female group context that elicits celebration and a form of pageantry, which I described in chapter six as being 'on display'. Whilst I have discussed earlier how getting ready to go out is a form of discipline, here the women use a different discourse to describe 'getting ready' which substitutes discipline for pleasure.

In these instances I suggest that whilst 'dressing up' is perceived as a disciplined expectation for going out in the NTE, it is also an pleasurable opportunity for the women to 'play up' to their audience (other young men and women). They are aware that they are visible and on 'display' and almost revel in engaging in activities that are '*not what is expected of girls*', namely getting drunk and being loud. And Velma's talk of dressing up with friends emphasises a tacit sense of 'sisterhood' that is reproduced across the participants' talk (e.g., '*just a kind've girly fun thing*' (Terry, line: 916)).

'New' feminine identities are lived, experienced and presented in multiple ways, and whilst my analysis reveals how themes of postfeminism and compulsory hyper-hetero-sexiness reflect a disciplinary gender and class technology, they are also, contradictorily, experienced as pleasurable and empowering. For example, in chapter six I highlighted the way in which Tracey talks of feeling overlooked and unattractive if she '*didn't have much flesh showing*' (line: 361), and how this reiterates the dominance and normalisation of a hyper-sexualised mode of femininity in 'going out' contexts. Alternatively, using the concept of '*bar-lesque*', Tracey's experience of showing '*flesh*' and '*sexing*' up her outfit, in wearing '*stockings and suspender belts and stuff*' (line: 255), might perhaps also be constructed as pleasurable. Whilst the hyper-sexualised 'look' can be interpreted as a means of emphasising 'female vulnerability, fragility, uncertainty and anxiety', which, McRobbie (2009:67) argues, is necessary to avoid the possibility of forfeiting male desire through coming forward as a woman'; or, indeed, interpreting the look as a powerless regime of 'invisible' hard work. It is also possible to contextualise the hyper-sexualised look as an expression of empowerment (Holland and Attwood 2009), and as pleasurable (Ferreday 2008). As a number of writers (e.g., Ferreday 2008; Evans, Riley, and Shankar 2010) point out, including third-wave feminists celebrating everything 'girlie' (sometimes referred to as 'girlie' feminism) (Baumgardner and Richards 2000; Karp and Stoller 1999), feminine identities are multiple and often contradictory.

Ferreday (2008:56) suggests that 'mainstream femininity is grounded in shame'; in other words, female bodies are 'presented as always already unruly' (Gill 2007a), and never 'feminine' enough. Women, surrounded by images of feminine ideals, are expected to 'take control' over their unruly physical selves, with bodily 'excess', such as hair (see chapter six) and fat, regarded as shameful. Yet the feminine subject is supposed to constantly work at hiding the labour and anxiety involved in controlling and remodelling her unruly body. This mainstream image of femininity contrasts with what Ferreday (2008:56) suggests as a 'diva-like', 'outspoken' flaunting of visibly high-maintenance femininity. I propose that, for some young women, pursuing an appearance of 'diva-like' femininity, often with the help of alcohol, is, in a way, 'shame-less'. For example, when I complimented Posh on a particular dress she wore, on an evening 'out', her reply emphasised the pride she felt in being very visible and, as India described earlier, '*full on*':

Extract - Posh: *Thank you (.) I had bright, bright red lipstick on as well didn't I*

Ferreday (2008) introduces the idea that 'red lips' are central to the imagery of new burlesque, and women make meaning from the cosmetics they choose. For example, according to Radner (1989:44), 'red lips' function as a sign, which is no longer exclusively about attracting the male gaze, but re-articulated as something a woman does for herself – to affect an effect. Posh's '*bright red lipstick*' and Tracey's '*stockings and suspender belt*' are perhaps less about achieving a hyper-sexualised look, and more about a discourse of 'tease'. Both accoutrements can be perceived as signs of sexual agency, with Posh and Tracey knowingly 'playing with their sexual power' (Gill 2008a:41). Yet, unlike this new figure of the sexually assertive woman, Posh and Tracey, and other participants such as Velma, are not forever 'up for it' (sex); rather, these women construct themselves within the '*look-but-don't-touch*' version of female sexualised behaviour (Ross and Moorti 2003:99) , which is arguably part of a burlesque discourse, and in this study, '*bar-lesque*'.

At the moment I am also following a line of enquiry, looking at the *bar-lesque* as post-feminist heterotopias in which these women construct themselves as 'objects of desire' using 'commodified performances' of the 'hot' lesbian (Gill 2008a, 2009a; Jackson and Gilbertson 2009).

Gill (2003:103) points out that there are exclusions to female assertive and liberated subjectivity, since only *some* women are constructed as active desiring sexual subjects, namely those who are young, slim and beautiful, and desire sex with men, with the exception of lesbian women who "perform" for men. According to Gaines (1989:50) 'consumer culture thrives on heterosexuality and its institutions by taking its cues from heterosexual 'norms''; this includes public leisure spaces in which certain public displays of affection are deemed socially acceptable (i.e. female-male) and others are not (i.e. gay and lesbian). Drinking spaces and places have been invariably male-oriented, and despite media claims that British drinking culture has been 'feminized' (Day 2010), these spaces still often reflect and reproduce male dominance. Women participating in the 'culture of intoxication' have to do so in socially prescribed ways, and this includes 'looking' heterosexual. However, many of my participants also engage in visibly provocative 'performances' of female-female touching and kissing, or simulating a heterosexual act of male penetration (see figures below), which can be perceived as examples of male heterosexual fantasy (Jenkins 2005), and epitomising the male gaze further. This evokes the question of why?



Figure 37: Tracey and Esmee



Figure 38: Lexie and India

I observed these visual ‘performances’ during nights out with the young women who had consumed a great deal of alcohol, and although it is not something they talked about in the interviews it does suggest some interesting tension. Rupp and Taylor (2010) reported similar findings, with female participants suggesting girls usually kissed other girls when they were drunk, and it was done to ‘turn guys on and to seek male attention’. And not unlike the women in my study, these ‘performances’ were encouraged by onlookers and photographic evidence uploaded on to social networking sites such as ‘Facebook’. This again reveals how alcohol acts as ‘*agent provocateur*’ in providing the young women with ‘illusionary’ confidence to become an ‘object of desire’.

Despite publicising images of these ‘performances’, as I’ve stated, the women made no reference to them in their interviews, and this is something Gill (2008a:53) has observed; she suggests it is something researchers should explore to ‘ascertain the kind of sense that different women make of advertising images of woman-woman sexual action’. Indeed, I propose that asking my participants about their women-women ‘performances’ would open up a new line of enquiry in exploring the power relations that operate in constructing this form of ‘commodified eroticism’; which Gill (2008a:54) describes as a mix of the ‘coolness of queer, alongside the sexual objectification of women’s bodies, and the soft-porn sexiness of seeing two young and attractive women engaging in intimate sexual conduct’. I suggest that if we perceive the ‘*bar-lesque*’ as a heterosexual ‘erotic market’, women who have access to hetero-normative ideals of ‘sexually attractive’, yet respectable femininity, can ‘trade on’ their erotic capital (as I discussed earlier) and use ‘same-sex eroticism’ as a form of power to manipulate the marketplace. However, it still raises the question of ‘who is the performance for?’ And the answer is inevitably men.

7.3.1 'No strip, just tease' – (dis)empowerment in 'bar-lesque'

The title for this section is based on Miss Polly Rae's, 'No strip, just tease' burlesque dance class. Defining herself as an established figure in UK burlesque (Rae 2011), Miss Polly Rae advertised her dance class, on the social networking site Facebook, as '*all about being cheeky, being sexy and feeling good...and something ALL women can enjoy*'²⁴. Similarly, the burlesque performer Dita von Teese talks about 'the tee[a]se' as an art form in which she, as the temptress, entices her audience, bringing their minds closer and closer to sex, only to then snatch it away (von Teese 2006).

Tracey's talk, of wearing '*stockings and suspender belts*', that are visible to the onlooker, is an example of the 'tease' in the sense that Tracey is 'simultaneously dressed and undressed' (Steele 1995:116); so that Tracey's stockings and suspenders are 'erotically charged' (Entwistle 2000:204), heightening sexual curiosity by holding in promise the thrill of exposure (Steele 1995:118). Similarly, Terry refers to Esmee's appearance as consisting of '*big leather boots and basically, underwear*' (line: 833-4). And whilst Terry considers this look to be unrespectable, unfeminine and not getting it 'right' (see earlier section), Esmee says she goes out wearing these particular clothes because: '*I think its se:xy*', and she wants '*people to look at us*' (line:338).



Figures 39 and 40: Esmee, Tracey and friends on 'nights out'

²⁴ <http://www.facebook.com/events/160478780655302/?ref=nf>

All the women in this study refer to wearing high-heeled shoes as a necessary part in making their outfits complete; they talk of owning '*unaccountable amounts of heels*' (Terry, line: 853) and how wearing heels makes them feel 'sexy'. Steele (1995:101) talks of the high-heeled shoe as a symbol of power, and in O'Donnell's (1999) study, women who wore what she refers to as 'fetish fashions' (e.g., high heels, corsets, stockings, suspenders) appeared more confident, self-assured, and sexy, and also experienced more attention from others, which further increased their sense of self-confidence that many of these women said they previously lacked. Similarly, Esmee says she likes the attention she gets from others, and this includes the *male gaze*, but in a way these women might be understood as 'producing themselves *for themselves*' (Attwood 2005:400). As Velma says, in talking about why she gets dressed up, '*I do it for me (.) it's for me*', and this, Gill (2009c:150) suggests, speaks of women's new sexual agency – 'powerful, playful and narcissistic'.

Forms of sexual exposure, or as Esmee puts it, having '*enough flesh out*', together with 'porno-chic' (McNair 2002), make up what Levy calls 'raunch culture' (2005); a culture in which hyper-sexualised imagery and the 'new fashionability of erotic performance' have become associated with young women's leisure practices (Holland and Attwood 2009:168). 'Neo-burlesque' is one such practice, in which women like Tracey and Esmee, adopt what Tyler refers to as a 'repertoire of 'liberated looks' (2005:37), enabling a '*look-but-don't-touch*' discourse in which they can perform the 'tease'. As Tracey elaborates in these extracts below:

Extracts- Tracey: *it is all the girls (.) trying to (.) attract the male attention really, and even though I don't wanna attract the male attention, I put the peacock outfit on just so I can compete (.) but I don't want the prize [laugh].*
 [later in the interview]
we don't go out to get touched up or anything like that, we go out for us (.) for the fun of competing, not for the competition, not for the prize even (.) if anything it is sort've teasing the boys I guess. We don't want anything from it, we just want the confidence I guess that you get from (.) being able to tease them (.) and then to say NO to that reaction is much more confidence boosting than gettin' it [the man].
 [later in the interview]
a nice night out is (.) when by the end of the night you're still standing, you're still smiling, you still feel good about yourself, you feel like you've accomplished something I guess, walking home without the prize because you said No, but you still look like you could say No (.) rather than falling around on your feet so that they wouldn't want you anyway

Tracey talks of not wanting to attract male attention as though male attention comes with strings attached; in other words, a proviso that she is 'up for it', and she does not want this – *'I don't want the prize'*. She is quite clear that her intentions for wearing what she refers to as her 'peacock' outfit (see figures 39 and 40 above) are not to get *'touched up'* by men but simply to be able to *'tease them'*. For Tracey, the 'tease' is about getting a reaction. Tracey might be seeking a similar reaction as that of the striptease artistes of burlesque, but for her the 'tease' is different, it is a *'no strip, just tease'* variation. Tracey wants validation that she's sexually attractive and she seeks this by wearing 'sexy' clothes that will titillate and provoke. But as far as Tracey is concerned merely attracting the male gaze is sufficient – *'we don't want anything from it'*. Knowing she is has attracted male attention is enough to increase Tracey's self-confidence, and she feels powerful being able to say *'NO to that reaction'*; she is able to 'look up-for-it', but looking does not mean touching and this is all part of her interpretation of the 'tease'. Esmee's talk about her dance routine also implicitly describes this 'tease' discourse:

Extract – Esmee: *I'd give him looks, I'd dance in front of him, without touching him, on purpose so he'd notice, and then (.) I'd go back to the shy (.) sort've stage*

Esmee talks of alternating between dancing in front of a young man *'on purpose'* so he will notice her, and then reverting to a *'shy stage'* and this can be interpreted as a form of burlesque dancing in which poses include 'Glamorous': grand extrovert poses and 'Cheesecake': shy girlish poses (Caloisi 2010:29).

Nonetheless, whilst a 'male reaction' is desired by most of the women in the study, and they talk of alcohol drinking to give them the confidence to attract male attention, some of the women construct the burlesque 'look' as unrespectable and disgusting:

Extract - Terry: *the way they represent themselves, wearing absolutely nothing and doing disgusting poses (.) alcohol gives them something that makes them want to be out there, want to be noticed. I think if a girl (.) say on a night out (.) if she's feminine (.) she wouldn't like, look like a hooker, in other words um she'd be (.) respectable*

Thus, according to Terry women like Tracey and Esmee look like *'hookers'* and are therefore not feminine or respectable. In constructing Tracey and Esmee in this way Terry is effectively limiting the possibilities for enacting alternative femininities in this context. Yet whilst Terry adds *'you wouldn't catch me doing that'* (line: 550), Amelie says she likes the way Tracey and Esmee look, although she almost uses them as a disclaimer since she

starts out by describing the look as slutty:

Extract - Amelie: *you have to dress like a slut if you want to go out and I hate that. I just think it's so (.) there are some people that actually look quite nice, Tracey looks nice, she doesn't look like slut, but (.) and she looks gorgeous and Esmee looks lovely, but there are some girls that just take the piss and they actually look like prostitutes*

Being labelled a slut based on what you wear is something I have discussed in earlier chapters, but here I am highlighting how these conflicting accounts, of Tracey's and Esmee's appearance, emphasise the difficulty young women have in getting the 'provocateur' look right. Women's appearance together with their alcohol drinking, in this *bar-lesque* pretence, means they will always be at risk of being judged. As Gill (2009d) points out, women's agentic capacities are limited to the 'aestheticisation of their physical appearances' (Lazar 2006); thus the women must negotiate a path between looking 'hot' and being chaste. Additionally, the young women's narratives open up further questions about 'power' and whether some young women look for validity to feel confident about themselves, or to be validated as 'sexy', or indeed, whether they want to be more 'desirable' than 'desiring' and these questions merit future investigation.

7.4 'Erotic Capital' and Uptown Girls

As I have illustrated in this chapter, it would not be shrewd to deny the possibilities of female agency within the young women's texts; and, as Attwood (2011:205) suggests, there is a 'potential plurality of meanings' surrounding agency, and 'a move towards sexualisation (at all levels of popular culture) has fused notions of a strong confident self with body display, self-pleasure and erotic gazing'. Physical attractiveness and sexuality has a long history, with a central feature of patriarchy being the construction of 'moral' prohibitions on women's sexual, social and economic activities (Hakim 2010). Yet, Hakim (2010:1) argues, in today's individualised and sexualised cultures 'erotic capital' gives women a significant advantage, and they have more 'erotic capital' than men because they work harder at it. Hakim (2010) defines 'erotic capital' as consisting of six elements: beauty; sexual attractiveness; social (grace, charm, social interaction skills); liveliness (physical fitness, social energy, good humour); social presentation; and sexuality (sexual competence, energy, erotic imagination, playfulness – attributes which Gill (2003) argues help materialise the new feisty, playful, desiring (heterosexual) subject of postfeminist advertising. Thus, Hakim says, erotic capital is a combination of aesthetic, visual, physical, social and sexual attractiveness in all social

contexts, and she talks about the performance of erotic capital as a creation – ‘a work of art’, which I suggest is not unlike my participants’ engagement with the ‘*bar-lesque*’.

In exploring Attwood’s suggestion of plurality further, I look at how my participants might use their ‘erotic capital’, as a form of agency, to achieve economic and social advantage within drinking cultures. For example, in the following extract Amelie implicitly uses her erotic capital to get free drinks:

Extract – Amelie: *you can use your femininity to um get you places and I think me and my friends are only just realising that like um (.) I got free drinks (.) guys don’t do that so much (.) they can’t really use their masculinity to get them in so many places like*

Amelie talks of using her *femininity*, as though it is a form of ‘erotic’ power, manipulating circumstances to her advantage (getting into ‘*places*’ and getting ‘*free drinks*’). She says, however, that she is only ‘*just realising*’ how powerful her femininity can be, and compares femininity with masculinity to emphasise the advantage she sees herself having over men. Amelie’s narrative highlights Attwood’s suggestion of plurality in meanings, since Amelie’s use of her femininity can be seen as a move towards self-pleasure – getting what **she** wants, yet it is also ‘classic’ feminine power. Therefore, perhaps the issue is more about sexuality/femininity being constituted as the only place for women’s power within postfeminism.

Like Amelie, Esmee also talks about using her femininity to access nightclubs for free, by using her ‘*womanly charm*’ (line: 200); while Posh talks of ‘knowing’ the right nightclub promoters and how this will ensure a cheap night out:

Extract – Posh: *you don’t pay for drink when you go to London not if you’re with the right promoters (.) we went to London we had four bottles of vodka, magnums (.) Belvedere, for free (.) for girls it’s free (.) because the girls have the table with the free vodka (.) the aim of London is (.) girls free, everything’s free (.) boys have to pay to get in, has to pay for a table, have to pay for a drink*

Posh asserts that being female is an advantage because women drink for free, yet these free-drinking clubs play an important commercial role in providing venues in which women can participate in the exploitation of their own sexuality (Stern 2005). For example, whilst Posh may be aware of the exploitative nature of these venues: ‘*yeh women are there (.)*

they're drinking and it's free, so there's guaranteed women in there' (line: 131), she still interprets this exploitation and manipulation by drinking establishments and nightclub promoters as something '*amazing*', and something she, as a woman, has achieved, *I love it* (.) *the girls just don't spend anything'* (line: 147). Dora too shares Posh's excitement about getting into London clubs for free:

Extract - Dora: *I mean we went up to London, last weekend.. 'cos my friend knows like all the PRs [promoters] up there so we had like VIP, with like drinks brought to our table all the night so I mean all we paid was ten pound to get up there in petrol, so I mean its brilliant 'cos you're just making the most of it aren't you (.) it's absolutely brilliant (.) we didn't pay entries to get in or nothing, that's normally twenty-five pound entry*

Neither Dora or Posh construct these 'privileges' as a problem, and whilst their presence is advantageous to the nightclubs in their promise of '*guaranteed women*', it would seem that, according to Posh, the only losers are male customers who have to pay for everything. Conversely, the women in one group discussion are acutely aware of this manipulation, but like Dora they still see this as a female advantage:

Extract – Lippy: *like we would probably go somewhere if it's full of men. Look at London, the girls go up there, they will get in the club free, they will get all their alcohol paid for all night because they know (.) that the men will be brought in by all the women and the blokes have to pay to get in and the blokes buy the girls drinks*

-India: *it's the way it should be*

-Lippy: *yeh..I'd say it's more better for women*

-Lexie: *yeh but then again (.) it's not because they need to try harder to get women in because women don't feel that they should*

Interviewer: Do you think they are using women to get men in?

Unanimous: 'Yeh'

-Mouse: *Yeh definitely*

-Lexie: *I don't mind that [laugh]*

-Lippy: *No, getting in somewhere free when it would have been twenty quid, and they, you know, supply you with alcohol all night, just to get the men in, to buy the girls' drinks (.) that's how they make their money*↑

All the women acknowledge and agree that clubs offer them free entry and free alcohol as a means of '*making money*'. According to Plant and Plant (2006: 2) it is a widely accepted equation that Alcohol + Women = Sex; and most of the women talked of 'bad' drinking experiences which resulted in not only unwanted male attention but drink-spiking which led to unaccountable periods of time, or what Lexie refers to as '*unidentified drinking injuries*'

(line:715). I explored in earlier chapters why 'control' is so important to women when they go out drinking in terms of managing 'respectability', but it is also evoked by the participants in relation to a need to protect themselves from male sexual violence.

The clubs the women describe rely on their 'erotic capital' to attract male paying clientele, thus as a form of commodity these women are required to dress to produce a 'hetero-hyper-sexualised' look. This again reinforces McRobbie's (2009) idea of the postfeminist masquerade and the expectation of new norms of appearance. As Posh puts it:

Extract - Posh: *in the public eye a girl's gotta be dolled up, you know they've gotta look fantastic*

As Posh emphasises, women have '*gotta be dolled up*', and '*looking fantastic*' and this is the image the clubs rely on to promote themselves. Many of the female clubbers in this study have uploaded club promotion pictures depicting themselves as shining examples of the 'fun loving woman' (see figures below), yet they rarely talk about how these clubs are relying on them, given that they are publicising their venues.



Figure 41: Posh



Figure 42: Terry and friends

Using Hakim's argument, women frequenting city nightclubs, such as Posh and her friends, can be perceived as a form of '*erotic capital*'. On the one hand they can be perceived as victims of male exploitation (since most of the promoters Posh talks of are male), valued for their hyper-hetero-sexualised 'look'. Yet, on the other hand, and again following Hakim's theory, erotic capital may be seen as giving these women an advantage, representing 'women's trump card in mating and marriage markets' (Hakim 2010:512). This latter statement of Hakim's is not something all the women in this study talk about as an end goal for 'dressing up', but it is certainly talked about:

Extract - Amelie: *well you can't help it can you (.) you go out and there is that thing in the back of your mind thinking – is he the one, is it going to be, am I going to meet someone*

Extract- India: *I like to look nice (.) you never know, you might meet the man of your dreams*

Both Amelie and India use a romance discourse in talking about meeting potential partners, '*is he the one*', '*man of your dreams*', and tacitly talk of about how their appearance in terms of attractiveness and therefore 'good' femininity. But the women in India's friendship group were quick to respond to her sense of submissiveness:

Extract - Lipy: *But if he was the man of your dreams he wouldn't care*
-Mouse: *Yeh they should like you how you are*
-Lexie: *and see the real you (.) no they can wait a few months for that [laugh]*

Here Lipy and Mouse imply that '*the man of your dreams*' should love you for what's inside, not on the surface (e.g., attractive appearance). And Lexie's talk of '*they can wait*' before they '*see the real you*', reiterates McRobbie's (2009) idea that femininity is a postfeminist masquerade.

I am not suggesting here that these young women are passive dupes of manipulative consumerism since they do talk of 'a good night out for free' and this suggests a sense of 'power' that is only available to them – as women. However, this is censured empowerment since it is only available to women who 'fit' the criteria of *erotic capital*; in other words, they must comply with the compulsory narrow discourses of hyper-hetero-sexy femininity deemed necessary in this culture, and this narrow criteria does not apply to all women. Furthermore as the club's policy regarding men is that they must be paired up with a woman, women such as Posh are encouraged by the promoters to bring men with them; as she says '*the more men you get in, the more Vodka they give you*' (line: 156).

The hyper-sexualisation being sold to these women as a way of expressing their agency, choice, and freedom can be perceived as exploiting their erotic capital. However, whilst it opens up spaces for young women to drink and have a sense of power (and pleasure), it also seems to lock them into a sense of valuing themselves as commodities in terms of their appearance and ability to attract men.

Posh tries to recoup a sense of authenticity and power by talking about her 'knowledge' of the quality of the clubs and more specifically, the brand of vodka she drinks (for free):

Extract – Posh: *the clubs in London are very swanky (.) they're different from around here, they're nice (.) and they only serve, they don't serve Smirnoff vodka (.) only Belvedere and like, we (.) must have drunk on Saturday night about a grand's worth of vodka (.) four magnum bottles yeh (.) easy*

Posh uses the word 'swanky' to describe the clubs, a word defined in the Oxford English Dictionary as '*stylishly luxurious and expensive*' (OED 2010), and she uses the word 'nice' to differentiate London clubs from those in her hometown. She also distinguishes between Smirnoff and Belvedere Vodka, implicitly emphasising that Belvedere is a superior brand by saying '*they don't serve Smirnoff*' and assuming that I, as the interviewer, would 'know' the difference. Furthermore, Posh, through her familiarity with the promoters of the club, discursively positions herself as 'different' from *other* young women in her hometown. She talks knowledgably about the 'set up' inside the London clubs and stresses '*it's not what you know, it's who you know*' (line: 154). Esmee also talked of her familiarity with nightclub bouncers in being able to '*stand in the VIP area and go in for free*' (line: 216), and whilst this might be seen as women using '*erotic capital*' (Hakim 2010), it also underlines women's 'value' as a commodity. In Foucauldian terms, women are a commodity manifesting through *aestheticized* practices of the self, they are 'bodies of capital'; in other words, the aesthetic practices of appearance women undertake are normalised and touted as necessary in order to meet the ideals of femininity and Foucault would describe this not as empowerment, but as docility.

There are arguments for and against 'appearance' being a form of 'erotic' power (Hakim 2010). Whilst McRobbie (2009:64) talks of the postfeminist masquerade as re-locating women back inside the terms of traditional gender hierarchies by having them supposedly choose to re-instate the 'spectacle of excessive femininity' for public consumption, other theorists (e.g., Hopkins 2002:105) argue that 'increasingly, in this media age, appearance is power... In most cases there is a significant return for investment in beauty'. What is certain is that the women in this study describe themselves as being *subjected* to a range of conflicting discourses. For example, Tracey explains her understanding of feminism as '*sort've girlpower, screw men blah blah blah*', and whilst she values this form of power she feels unable to '*practice feminism*' because '*I care too much about what men think of me*' (line: 1081-2). Thus, whilst Hopkins (2002) may argue that appearance is power, I would suggest it is actually disempowering, since the subjectivity of many of the young women in this study fragiley relies on the attention of men; no matter how powerful they say they feel,

in their narratives power is of themselves as a commodity (as a thing, not a person) and is deeply dehumanising.

In exploring the elements of Hakim's erotic capital theory, and moving debates on, I find that often it is also only through drinking alcohol that these young women are able to 'use' this erotic power. Taking Hakim's description of 'liveliness' as a display of dancing skills, both Tracey and Esmee's talk (in an earlier extract p.147) suggests that their own form of dancing is a form of power; and one which they say places them apart from other women and evokes the attention they seek. Yet their special form of dancing is something they can only do if they have consumed a certain amount of alcohol because alcohol acts as *agent provocateur* in giving them the confidence to *become* 'sexy'. As Esmee says, she emulates Beyonce's dance routine to '*get the attention off a male*' (line :254); but as I discussed earlier in the chapter, the women often 'dance' for the male gaze as a form of tease.

The women enjoy using their erotic capital, in the burlesque sense of '*teasing the boys*' and feeling good because men '*are staring and looking*' at them; their power is in their alcohol-induced performance of 'suggestive choreography', which I am referring to as '*bar-lesque*', and being able to say *NO* to men's sexual advances, since Tracey says she '*doesn't want the prize*' (line: 394). Similarly, Velma talks of '*making the most of my assets*', which involves:

Extract – Velma: *I go out, with (.) a lot of make-up on↓ (.) wearing not a lot (.) well, I'll wear tight clothes and show off my figure (.) and a lot of blokes take that as 'Yep come on' (.) but I couldn't be further from that*

And Velma goes on to say that she '*aspires to be*' like her sister who is:

Extract – Velma: *'absolutely stunning and her figure is amazing' and 'that's what she does, that's her job' (.) and she's (.) got fake boobs and (.) a tan and all that*

Velma's sister is a 'promo girl', or 'glamour model', for car manufacturers at circuit-racing championships, a job, she tells me, which is highly paid. Velma emulates her sister's 'look': '*fake tan, loads of make-up, big hair*' and '*you know I've had my boobs done*', and her narrative does suggest that she feels empowered through her appearance. However, validation that she 'looks good' is through the male gaze, and this can be deeply damaging; as Tracey says, she does not think it is '*fair*' on '*girls like*' her because she, like many other women, has '*suffered*' with '*eating disorders, some emotional breakdowns um been on anti-depressants, even tried suicide all because I feel unattractive*' (line: 1085-6).

In summarising this section, it would seem that hetero-hyper-sexy' femininity is constituted as a form of power; for example, in getting into clubs for free, this power has a cash value of at least '*twenty-five pound*' (Dora), and in terms of the amount of free alcohol the women drink on these occasions, Posh says '*we must have drunk about a grand's worth*'. So, free access to '*swanky*' clubs and expensive brands of Vodka, things the young women couldn't normally afford, makes them feel special and valued and they love it; as Dora says '*it's absolutely brilliant*', it is one of the benefits of being a girl and that's '*the way it should be*' (India). Furthermore, their 'sexy' appearance means they attract men which benefits not only the clubs, but the young women too because men buy them drinks and '*you never know, you might meet the man of your dreams*' (India). Thus, whilst some of the girls sense how their appearance is a commercial benefit to others, others just focus on the benefits to them; either way a 'sexy' appearance becomes constructed, and experienced, as power and pleasure.

However, the women's power and pleasure is driven by appearance and this effectively excludes women who do not 'dress up' in a 'sexy' way and in a context in which women and alcohol = sex (Plant and Plant 2006), the men 'know' that these women have effectively been 'paid for'. In an informal (unrecorded conversation) with Velma, she talks about her recent visit to one of these clubs and how the male customers constantly pinched her bottom and tried to kiss her. She said '*just because they've paid to get in and we haven't, they expect us to do whatever they want*', and, on reflection, Velma said the free alcohol was not enough to make her want to go back again. Velma's comments, I feel, echo Gill's (2007a:160) findings in an issue of the men's magazine *FHM*, in which men were encouraged to calculate their 'outgoings', which here would be buying drinks for women, and divide them by the number of 'shags' they'd had that month. If men are encouraged to think of women in this manner, it is no wonder Velma says she feels like '*a sex toy*' in the club. This exploitation works in a way that commodifies the women, determining their value through appearance; and from the women's narratives, both in earlier chapters and here, we can see that at least some of the young women find participating in hyper-sexualised femininity deeply painful.

7.5 Women-only-ness and all-female drinking friendship groups

Hey (1997:30) argues that it is between and amongst women as friends that identities are variously practised, appropriated, resisted and negotiated'. As she points out, girls' friendships involve the intimacy of sharing and supporting one another, but they also involve

practices of inclusion and exclusion. For example, Henrickson (2004) uses the concept 'women-only-ness', to examine the ways in which individual and collective gendered identity constructions contradict one another within women-only settings; and Donnelly's (2012) idea of 'women onlyness' in which being in a group, women actively negotiate and 'win' leisure spaces for themselves, and develop a sense of familiarity, comfort and 'more control' in their activities. Both ideas highlight the ways in which 'sameness' is constructed within the all-female group; appropriately-gendered behaviours are often endorsed by the 'collective' nature of the group, and this limits the possibilities of the individual in constructing alternative femininities. Additionally, whilst males are absent from these group settings, often the male gaze still influences the ways in which the 'group' want to be perceived. However, at the same time women-only 'group settings provide spaces in which women feel safe and often empowered to express their gender in fluid and flexible ways. Below, I explore these concepts, highlighting the multiple, yet often contradictory, gender regimes associated with all-female drinking groups.

During the study, the idea that women's 'nights out' are shaped by their relationships with other women, emerged as a key element, reflecting contradictory expressions of affection, hatred, fun and tension in the context of close, long-lasting 'best friendships': '*my girls*', and more short-lived camaraderie between small groups of women.

Griffin (2000) provides a brief review of the somewhat little research carried out on female friendship groups, but notably McRobbie (1978) study of bedroom culture focused on the bedroom as an exclusive space for close female friendship groups and primarily involved experimenting with make-up, hair and clothes, and gossiping about 'heterosexual romance'. Lincoln (2004) developed McRobbie's work further by suggesting girls, in the 1990s, were more active in shaping their social and cultural-life worlds. Her work included the new forms of communication technologies, such as mobile phones and computers for social networking, which the women use.

Both Lincoln's (2004) and McRobbie's (1978) studies highlight the importance of the bedroom as a cultural space in the social life worlds of young women and my own data reflects this, particularly the normative practice of 'pre-drinking' whilst getting ready to 'go out', which usually took place in one of the women's bedrooms. However my data also reveals a number of key themes emerging in the women's talk about their experiences of changing power dynamics and their own subjectivities in their relationships with female friends.

7.5.1 'Sisters are doin' it for themselves'

'Sisters are doin' it for themselves' was written by Annie Lennox and Dave Stewart over twenty-five years ago, yet its message has considerable relevance in today's neoliberal, postfeminist climate. Whilst Lennox intended the song to be a feminist anthem, postfeminist discourses tend to assume feminist struggles have ended, namely, that women today enjoy full equality and can 'have it all' (Lazar 2009:371); in fact, as I discussed in chapter two (2.2), it is becoming a women's world in which everything feminine is celebrated (Baumgardner and Richards 2004). As Dora points out:

Extract – Dora: *I know I'm a girly girl (.) I like to dress up, put on a new dress (.) high heels definitely (.) yeh (.) shoes and a bag, matching bag (.) matching belt. Yeh there's the look, but then the way I am when I'm out, like um body language and stuff (.) I drink as much as I wanna drink*

Dora's narrative conveys the postfeminist discourse that says it's ok to celebrate everything feminine and girly (unlike the message of second-wave feminism), and she can dress up. However, her talk of the '*the look*' is constituted in contradiction to '*but the way I am when I'm out, body language and stuff, I drink as much as I wanna drink*'. Dora's talk highlights both McRobbie and Gill's arguments that postfeminist discourses are fraught with contradictions, in which ideas of 'choice and autonomy sit side-by-side with surveillance, discipline and the vilification of those who make the 'wrong' choices' (Gill 2007a:163).

As Walkerdine (2003) points out, in contemporary neoliberal society identities are no longer given or conferred by tradition and larger social structures, but are now more fragmented and more individual; the onus is now on women (and men) to render their lives meaningful, shaping their biographies through telling and, in doing so, taking up what Rose (1999c) describes as an identity of a 'choosing self'. Lipy, for example, says women today do not necessarily have to think about marriage and motherhood until they are older, as that is '*like going back to (.) you should stay in, have a baby, cook, clean and (.) be a housewife sort've thing*' (line: 1841-2), and Lipy says women should not feel 'ashamed' about getting drunk, rather '*it's something you should be proud of*' (line: 1133). Nonetheless, Dora's discursive use of the word 'but' in presenting her behaviour suggests otherwise.

Yet as I have discussed earlier and the narratives of my participants highlight, there is no singular, stable 'postfeminism' (or neoliberalism), but 'rather a set of dispersed discourses, positions and practices inflected by the specificity of the different contexts in which it

emerges' (Walkerdine and Bansel 2010:492). As these discourses are often complex and contradictory, for the young women, making sense of what is 'appropriate' femininity for going out drinking is complicated.

I suggest that one way in which the women can and do make sense of these discourses is through their female friendships – or 'sisterhoods'. It is through these 'sisterhoods' that the young women can be seen to be 'doing it for themselves', and not in an individualistic way but in a powerful and pleasurable collective sense.

All the women talk about their relationships with female friends, and how these friendships developed with certain life changes, such as leaving school or college and either going on to university or starting work, affecting the strength of such friendships. Often the women's friendships are formed on the basis of 'drinking mates' with women who do not drink often relegated as 'boring'. Amelie talks about growing up with a group of girls and how these friendships diminished leaving her with two '*really good friends*':

Extract - Amelie: *um well with Tracey we were best friends all the time, but in school I made my really good friends, Peyton and Loretta. We were all close friends and then Wanda and Peyton went off to XXX college and me and Loretta went to XXX college and then Wanda (.) came out of the closet and Loretta was just kind of 'Oh↓'. I always suspected it, it was absolutely fine, but Wanda kind of distanced herself, she made like loads of gay friends, which is fine, but she kind of abandoned her other friends. But with Loretta we've got closer, and Peyton's the same. Peyton's very 'sex in the city, Bridget Jones' (.) I sometimes meet up with Tracey but we've both got very different lives now*

Amelie uses discourses of '*best friends*' and '*really good friends*' to describe her ties with the girls she went to school with. Once they all moved on from school to different locations/colleges, this altered the friendship ties. Amelie talks of a sense of 'abandonment' with Wanda revealing herself as gay and Loretta reacting negatively, 'Oh↓', to the news. To become and remain a '*best friend*' is seemingly based on similarity, a likeness in terms of aspirations and sociability; as Amelie describes the shift in her relationship with Tracey, from '*we were best friends all the time*' to '*I sometimes meet up*' because they now have '*very different lives*'. Amelie talks about her two '*really good friends*': Peyton and Loretta, with whom she has become '*closer*', as:

Extract - Amelie: *we're just absolutely like sisters now*

And many of the young women talk about this sisterly bond and how it involves getting ready together for a night out, or having drinking parties at home:

Extract - Amelie: *me, Loretta and Peyton we just kind of go round each other's houses and have a wine night[†], like, or a cocktail night whatever and it's just us three, and we just get drunk basically (.) we really like dressing up, we're always like dressed up nicely, like heels and a really nice dress (.) and we always get ready at each other's houses (.) like I would do Loretta's make-up, she's just kind of 'Do my eyes for me', and Peyton'll do our hair*

Amelie's talk emphasises a sense of fun, intimacy and equality about her friendship with Peyton and Loretta, whom she refers to as '*my girls*' (line: 852), and the sense that being '*just us three*' is not only close-knit, but empowering and the girls has valuable roles within the group; for example, Amelie is in charge of doing *make-up*, and Peyton *hair*.

Similarly, during a group discussion the women talked about how sharing a hotel room meant they could all get ready together:

Extract – Lipsy: *The best nights out are like, when we do a hotel (.) you all go down there, get pissed in our hotel room*
-Lexie: *get ready together*
-Lipsy: *yeh get ready together which is always ten times better (.) it wouldn't be sort've all do it separately, everyone does it together*

Again, like Amelie, Lipsy emphasises how getting '*ready together*' is much better ('*ten times*') than doing it alone. Their sense of collaboration also extends to shopping for outfits:

Extract – Lipsy: *we all bought outfits together that we were gonna wear out in a couple of weeks (.) and then we decided we weren't gonna wear them so we all had these outfits that we hadn't worn*

Lipsy uses '*we*' and '*together*' to describe how the women go about choosing outfits to wear on nights out, which again emphasises the element of 'sameness'; it might stress the idea of a powerful and pleasurable 'collective' identity, but at the same time it does not seem to allow any room for individuality. This is something Gill (2007a:154) notes about the postfeminist sensibility – the way it works in producing a dialogue of autonomy and pleasure, yet avoids how 'socially-constructed, mass-mediated images of beauty are idealised and made our own'.

7.5.2 “It’s amazing what ‘we’ can do”

In a collective group, the women often talk about themselves as ‘**we**’, rather than ‘I’, in the context of alcohol drinking, which highlights the role of drinking as a social activity and not an individual one. In using the pronoun ‘we’, the women also portray themselves as a collective force to be reckoned with, as Dora puts it, *‘it’s amazing what ‘we’ can do’* (line: 217).

Drinking can be seen as a collective experience, a discourse of ‘*togetherness*’, within which decisions on what to drink and where to go are tacitly negotiated. The women also state that the size of their all-female drinking group is very important, in terms of safety, and that ‘having fun’ relies on being in a tight-knit group. As the women in Lexie’s group explain:

- Extract - Lexie: *we can go to the bar and drink shots or can do whatever as long as we’re together and having a good time*
- Mouse: *we’d never go and like leave our mates*
- Lipsy: *I prefer a group of about five or six max (.) anything more is hectic*
- India: *I don’t, I prefer less (.) ‘cos someone goes off somewhere*
- Mouse: *and no one wants to go to the same place*
- Lexie: *I don’t like big groups because you, a) you lose people b) you’re all talking over each other*
- Lipsy: *you stay in your group, you don’t really talk to anyone else (.) I think its intimidating when you go out with a big group*

The women’s talk emphasises how important group size is to their sense of ‘*togetherness*’, and how too many women can be potentially risky because ‘*someone goes off*’ and ‘*you lose*’ them. Keeping the group relatively small (‘*five or six max*’) means the women are able to enjoy themselves without worrying where everyone is, or compete for each other’s attention (‘*talking over each other*’). Lipsy also highlights the ‘*intimidating*’ effect their ‘*togetherness*’ has on others, enhancing their sense of collective female exclusivity and strength as a group that relies on unquestionable loyalty. Furthermore, in constituting themselves as a collective group, ‘*we can go to the bar*’ and ‘*as long as we’re together*’, the women are, in a sense, able to evade the Government’s message: ‘Know Your Limits’, which, as part of their ‘*Safe, Sensible, Social*’ (DoH/HO 2007) campaign, relies on a neoliberal form of governance in portraying excessive drinking as a deficit of ‘individual’ self control. This is something Dora talks about in describing how, in being part of a group, she does things which she would otherwise consider risky:

Extract - Dora: *yeh..chat up some boys, say 'Give us a lift' [laugh] yeh that is for real, you have to be careful though, but like one night, we went to XXXX and there was five of us, five girls right, and like after the night out, there was some matey† and he was all on his own, he was only a young lad, so we all like started terrorising him [laugh], and he was like 'How are you girls I' home then?'. We said 'Oh we're getting a taxi'. 'I'll give you a lift' he goes (.) we all got a lift home (.) we'd just terrorised him for like half a hour [laugh] (.) it's amazing what we can do isn't it?*

Dora acknowledges that some of their antics are potentially dangerous, and she uses the example of chatting up strangers and asking for a lift to highlight that they *'have to be careful'*. However, Dora implies that a number of women together means they can take risks, invoking the old adage 'there is safety in numbers'. Like Sheehan and Ridge's (2001) participants, the women here are aware of and practice certain harm minimization strategies, like staying in a group and minimising separation by keeping the group size small. However, Dora's talk of *'it's amazing what we can do'* also emphasises the notion of power through femininity, and in this example 'collective femininity'. She talks of 'we' and 'terrorising' which seems to increase their social solidarity as women who are, perhaps, implicitly acknowledging the existence of gendered inequalities? And in one group discussion, the women discuss how their might be perceived as intimidating:

Extract – Lipsy: *I think its intimidating when you go out with a big group*
 -Lexie: *yeh its intimidating (.) I suppose if you are a bloke it can be a bit scary [laugh]*
 -India: *Especiallly us girls*

The women present themselves as *'intimidating'* when they are in a group, and intimate that this construction could make men scared; something which is enlightening given that men often negatively construct groups of women out drinking (e.g., Lyons, Dalton, and Hoy 2006).

Being in a 'collective' group means the women can drink excessively and have a fun night out: *'where there's loads of you, you have so much fun'* (Velma, line: 90). As Posh explains, she typically goes to London with a group of five women, where the clubs provide them with magnum sized bottles of Belvedere Vodka for free. Belvedere is 40% alcohol by volume content and a magnum sized bottle contains 1.5 litres, thus including the two bottle of wine that Posh and her friends consumed before leaving for London, each of the women drinks a minimum of 30 units. Whilst all the women only drink excessively on Friday and Saturday nights, with occasional light drinking nights during the weekdays, their drinking more than the

recommended daily and weekly guidelines for 'sensible drinking' could be constructed as a form of pleasurable resistance. Furthermore, very few of the women talk of their excessive drinking as being hazardous (a term used within Government guidelines to define women's alcohol consumption of more than 6 units of a day or over 35 units a week). Regardless of the negative outcomes of excessive drinking, such as being sick or having hangovers the next day, the women maintain that even these are funny and something to talk about. When I asked one group of women if they ever had bad nights because of alcohol, they said:

Extract – India: *no (.) unless you're throwing up*
-Lipsy: *still not classed as a bad night though*
-Lexie: *no*
Lipsy: *Like that night we went to XXXX, I was horrendously ill wasn't I? I was paralytic in the toilets (.) with my fingers down my throat, yet I still had a fucking wicked night [laugh]*

Lipsy looks to her friends within her group for confirmation, '*wasn't I?*' This validation is something the women rely on; it confirms their solidarity and shared intimacy and this in turn corroborates their 'telling' or 'displaying' of self. Lipsy's account also emphasises that being '*horrendously ill*' as a result of drinking too much doesn't necessarily spoil a good night out.

Furthermore, it is perhaps this intimacy and sense of '*togetherness*', that being in an all-female group provides, that enables the women to relax a little, and also makes their excessive drinking more meaningful and positive. Studies have shown how drinking aids bonding (Montemurro and McClure 2005; Sheehan and Ridge 2001), and as drinkers these women identify as members of a social circle. The women talk about the pleasure they get as 'members' in recounting their shared drunken experiences after nights out, as Esmee expresses:

Extract – Esmee: *I'd say a successful night is gettin' attention and when you go home (.) having little gossipy bits to talk about*

Furthermore, it would seem that the stigmas talked about in terms of women's intoxication, such as respectability and 'good' femininity, do not significantly constrain the women if they go out drinking in a group; rather drinking increases the social and pleasurable aspects of 'going out', and as a group they feel empowered to do '*amazing*' things including, perhaps, the behaviours that society considers deviant. One example of this can be seen in Tracey's narrative about her friend Tina:

Extract – Tracey: *Tina likes to get hammered, she will get to the stage where she is screaming and launching herself on the dance floor, or pissing up the wall (.) in front of men (.) she'll get naked in the middle of the street [later in the interview] it's like Tina, she acts like (.) a ladette*

Whilst Tracey associates Tina's behaviour, such as getting 'hammered', 'screaming' and 'pissing up the wall', with being a 'ladette', Tina can also be understood through the figure of the 'Phallic girl', who 'adopts the habits of masculinity including heavy drinking....flashing her breasts in public...without relinquishing her own desirability to men' (McRobbie 2009:83). A position, which some might suggest, is powerful and pleasurable, since it gives the impression of having won equality with men by permitting displays of unfeminine behaviour seemingly go unpunished. Often these 'unfeminine behaviours' provide the young women with stories to savour and recount, as one group explain:

Extract – Velma: *yeh she got so drunk (.) and she went for a wee and forgot there were people watching [laugh]*
-Boo: *I opened my legs, but I was falling over (.) so I went in my shoes [laugh] (.) it was so funny, it was so funny [laugh]*
-Twee: *yeh like last time Boo peed on me! I held the umbrella for her being nice and she was like (.) projectile (.) peeing [laugh]*

Within the group context, these stories are told with a sense of pride and the women are not ashamed of their alcohol consumption. Together with Tina and Boo, several other participants talked, informally, about how they hitch up their skirts to relieve themselves regardless of where they might be and who is present. Their actions suggest a sense of blurring between gendered behaviours; the women are wearing 'signs' of traditional femininity (skirts, high-heeled shoes) at the same time as emulating men in openly relieving themselves. Thus the women constitute themselves as active, sexually assertive female subjects who are always 'up for it' – certainly in terms of a bit of fun.

Additionally, by sharing the responsibility of looking out for one another in the group context, the women are able to push the boundaries on alcohol consumption. For example, Velma says:

Extract - Velma: *I don't feel I need to be in control for drinking 'cos you know you've got your friends, like (.) if I'm really wasted then I've got you two [looks at Boo and Twee] you definitely feel a lot safer if you're with people you one hundred per cent trust (.) if I got really drunk you'd look after me and visa versa*

Thus, for Velma, being in a group of female friends that she can rely on and deeply trust ('100%') means she can relax and get drunk if she wants to. Velma no longer feels she *'needs to be in control'* because Boo and Twee will *'look after'* her, and she therefore constructs her intoxication as a 'calculated risk activity made safe(r)' (Riley, Thompson, and Griffin 2010:447) by this shared sense of *'togetherness'*. Velma's sense of belonging and security can also be seen, not just in terms of safety from potential sexual assault, but safety in terms of 'female validation', since shopping with each other and helping each other with their appearance (doing each other's hair etc.) increases their ability to create themselves into the desired hyper-feminine image, allowing them to successfully pass the public female gaze of other women (see chapter 6.3).

Green's (1998) work on 'women doing friendship', highlights how their friendships act as a mechanism through which feminine subjectivities are secured; and in a competitive and (neoliberal) individualistic world, being amongst girlfriends with whom you can share a strong sense of belonging, means the young women as 'individuals' can partially escape the damaging postfeminist 'female gaze'. So that while helping each other dress up can be read as a 'policing' one another to ensure 'sameness' (Winch 2012). This 'sameness' in sisterhood can also be used to manage the competitive nature of participating in hyper sexual femininity in the *bar-lesque*, as Tracey's narrative about her girlfriend Esmee reveals:

Extract - Tracey: *'wanna match levels, it's just a mutual thing, it's not a competition between us (.) I would never say (.) if she asked if something looked good and I didn't think that it looked as good as it can be, I'd never say 'yeh, yeh, yeh', I'd try and help her, even if it meant (.) I suddenly felt a bit less attractive 'cos she looks more (.) you can't have jealousy between friends, so we mutually make each other feel as good as we can before we go out*

7.6 Summary

It is possible to understand how 'doing' 'hyper-sexy' femininity can be both pleasurable and empowering for the young women. However, it would seem their construction of forms of 'sexual entrepreneurship', is both an obligation, as well as an opportunity, to perform a version of sexual subjectivity in drinking cultures. As such, this subject position does flout the stereotypical figure of the 'ladette', providing the women with an opportunity to be *'girlie girls'* without having to 'drink like a girl' and be boring. Many of the young women talk about

the fun they have in getting 'dressed up' and intoxicated, particularly within all-female groups.

However, in drawing the young women's sense of pleasure and power in participating in the 'culture of intoxication', their narratives also highlight how these themes are often problematic. Simultaneously, a woman's success in being recognised as respectably 'sexually desirable', depends '*on the way you act when you're very drunk*' (Terry, lines: 689-90); not being too '*full on*' and '*loud*' so as to attract the 'wrong' attention, but '*finding the balance*' so they will be envied by *other* women rather than judged as failures. And 'failure' not only includes the possibility of being relegated to the position of '*ladette*', '*slut*', '*skank*' or '*slag*' (as I discussed in chapters five and six), but being enviably desirable also any woman who does not 'fit' the idealised image of the hyper-hetero-sexy feminine subject.

As many of the young women place so much importance on looking 'sexually desirable', it seems valuing the self can only be done through appearance/as a commodity; and for women like Boo, who can only feel '*like Kate Moss*' after she's consumed a lot of alcohol, it can be very damaging and dehumanizing. Despite living in a so-called postfeminist time in which women are presented as not seeking men's approval but as '*doing it for themselves*', and in doing so, just happen to attract male admiration (Gill 2009d), the women's narratives highlight how they still value themselves as objects of the male gaze. Furthermore, the UK media and government's primary concern with health and safety issues, associated with female excessive drinking, overshadows and ignores how complex and contradictory it is actually like being a young woman today. Not only do they ignore the pleasures and powers women such as my participants get from excessively drinking, but they (mis)understand what it is like to live in a neoliberal, postfeminist culture in which women have to constantly 'prove' themselves, and are defined by what they do and how their bodies are 'read'.

Chapter Eight: Discussion

8.1 Introduction

The first aim of this chapter is to clearly and succinctly revisit the aims of the research. As discussed, this research aimed to investigate certain articulations of femininity as they manifest themselves within contemporary British drinking cultures. More specifically, my research aimed to produce meaningful analyses of the relationships between female excessive alcohol consumption and postfeminist discourses of femininity, and how these accounts and practices are situated within a wider cultural context that includes neoliberalism, postfeminism, consumerism and the culture of intoxication; this being supported by the adoption of a feminist poststructuralist approach and discourse analysis. The remainder of the chapter considers the success and value of the thesis in light of these aims. I achieve this firstly by summarising the main findings, 'bringing together' discussions presented in chapters two and three, but with a particular emphasis on my empirically-based chapters which highlight the prescriptive, enabling and provocateur aspects of alcohol in relation to postfeminism and the night-time economy (NTE) for this group of participants; and secondly, how my findings contribute to postfeminist theory. Finally, this chapter considers the strengths and limitations of the study, and how my findings might be built upon, for example, through possible future directions for research, before I reflect on the theoretical framework of the project.

8.2 Summary: 'New' femininities and the 'culture of intoxication'

This thesis illustrates how women, drinking in the UK's 21st century night-time economy (NTE) environment, may still be subjected to greater control, in terms of, for example, expectations around 'appropriate behaviour', than men. As I discussed in chapter three, historically women could drink, and not unlike today they were usually constructed as a problem. Women's drinking, particularly in public spaces, was presented in many ways as transgressing social convention, and violating the norms of being a 'good' woman – the norms of appropriate femininity (Broom and Stevens 1991). Since the late 1960s, many women have become more economically independent; with opportunities to control fertility, gain qualifications, and work, so that women are able earn enough money to participate in consumer culture. Women's drinking has also become more 'visible' in British society. Nonetheless, as I pointed out in chapter two, this 'visibility' is conditional – it seems women can only participate providing they do not threaten the gender order (McRobbie 2009).

As I described in chapter three, attitudinal and behavioural changes in relation to alcohol consumption in the 1990s together with the development of the 'night-time economy' (NTE), has led to a new 'culture of intoxication' in which young people are encouraged to pursue *determined drunkenness* (Measham 2004b) through the commodification of hedonism. Young women, having gained a limited social autonomy, are now, alongside men, often expected to participate in this 'new' culture in which intoxication is normalised, and young women are now recognised by the alcohol industry as important consumers of urban nightlife, with their new visibility in the NTE leading to a branding, marketing and feminizing of alcohol. Nevertheless, it is young women's drunkenness which continues to be presented in UK media and governmental discourse as socially unacceptable; young women are still portrayed as immoral and unrespectable, and in constructing 'binge drinking' as a British 'disease' UK government and media use 'blame' discourses in representing women's drinking as the reason for its contagion.

Alongside young women's increased visibility I have also discussed the emergence of new femininities that have been theorised in terms of the politics of gender and location in contemporary culture as distinctively neoliberal and postfeminist (Gill and Scharff 2011). As discussed in chapter two, young women, surrounded by celebratory postfeminist discourses such as 'girl power' in the media and popular culture (Genz and Brabon 2009), are urged to experience themselves as agentic sexual subjects (Gill and Arthurs 2006; Renold and Ringrose 2011). Yet, for young women, enacting these new femininities is not necessarily a matter of 'choice' since they are accompanied by new forms of discipline (enabled through a rhetoric of 'freedom'). Therefore, in summary, young women's greater access to public space, including drinking spaces, often means they find themselves critiqued for not just being drunk, but drunk and in a dress.

It is with this in mind, that I presented the analyses, in chapters five, six and seven, based on my interpretations of a relatively homogeneous group of localised young women's accounts of how they negotiate postfeminism; and through an in-depth exploration, how they made sense of their own and each other's participation in new forms of femininity, particularly hyper-sexualised femininity, inside the drinking cultures of the night-time economy. I outlined three key interlinking discourses: alcohol as prescriptor, alcohol as enabler, and alcohol as provocateur. These three ways of conceptualising alcohol highlight the theoretical and empirical contribution of this thesis and are summarised as follows:

8.3 Key contributions to research

8.3.1 Alcohol as Prescriptor: young women are stuck in a ‘we do it but we don’t know why’ dilemma

In chapter two, I discussed how, in different ways, both Gill and McRobbie see postfeminism as a coming together of a complex and contradictory set of understandings and practices (Gill 2008b; McRobbie 2004c). In Gill’s work she talks about the construction of femininity as a bodily practice, and similarly, McRobbie (2009) argues that sites within popular (consumer) culture act as ‘spaces of attention’ in which young women are offered sexual and social recognition providing they embody acceptable hetero-(hyper-sexy) femininities. With public spaces, such as the UK’s night-time economy, becoming increasingly hyper-sexualised (Measham and Østergaard 2009), women are no longer recognised as passive objects of the patriarchal gaze, but characterised through postfeminist celebratory discourses such as ‘girl power’ as active, desiring sexual subjects.

Griffin (2005:11) states ‘young women must drink alcohol if they wish to socialise’, and as I discussed in chapter three, ‘determined drunkenness’ has not only become an accepted, but expected aspect of youth leisure culture (Measham 2004b). For many young people, going out in the UK’s NTE and drinking to get drunk is a deliberately sought state of being and aimed for to experience the intensity, joy and euphoria of intoxication. Yet, as McRobbie (2009) points out, ‘spaces of attention’ are where resurgent patriarchal power effectively exerts control over young women’s lives and subtly reasserts dominance. Illustrating this with the example of ‘make-over’ TV programmes such as *‘What Not to Wear’*, she highlights how the format of the programme has women competing and critiquing each other. McRobbie (2009:125) argues that ‘spaces of attention’ work in re-establishing hierarchies of class, race and gender, especially in the UK where there is a shift towards a more competitive neoliberal order.

My analysis highlights how drinking in the ‘culture of intoxication’ is problematic for a particular group of young women. The women talked as though they had no choice but to join in the drinking culture, since being sober was not something they either contemplated nor, it would seem, as Griffin (2005) suggested, was it an available option if they wanted to socialise. Furthermore, there seemed to be little talk of drinking being something the women in this study did because they liked alcohol. Thus, these themes together highlight how, for these particular women, drinking is routine and prescriptive, and something they are expected to do, yet they seem to be stuck in a ‘we do it but we don’t know why’ dilemma.

The women also negotiated a cultural problematizing of women drinkers (see chapter three), which impacted on their identity constructions. For example, the women use a number of discursive strategies such as defending and justifying their drunkenness, often in terms of something that *'you do when you're young'*; reinforcing the prescriptive character of drinking and the absence of space for other ways of engaging in the NTE.

Despite constructing drinking as essential to the women's sense of self, since it is something they *'need'* to do to socialise, dance and *'be seen'*, the women in this study were not able to articulate unburdened and agentic drinking identities. The women talk about *'joining in'* and getting drunk because that is what everyone does, but it also requires them to be *'in control'*.

As I discussed in chapter three, 'control' can be understood as a form of 'calculated hedonism' (Szmigin et al. 2008) in which the women's pursuit of intoxication is regarded as a pleasure contained by time, space and social situation (Measham 2004a, 2004b). However, in my participants' narratives, 'control' was constructed as a requirement to look and behave as though they are not drunk, and thus perform a subject position that is both psychologically and physically contradictory that of being *'soberly drunk'*. Resonating with the Foucauldian (and postfeminist) concepts of how the regulation of the subject occurs through 'self-surveillance' and 'self-policing' (chapter two), the women emphasised how, if they want to get drunk, they must also do so in a soberly and 'appropriately' feminine way to avoid being judged as unrespectable, or ladette-ish, or being implicated as a 'chav' and/or 'slut'; all denigrating labels. The women thus off-set their failure to conform to traditional but still normative codes of femininity through their drinking, by reproducing highly stylised modes of femininity in appearance so as to be able to claim 'respectability'.

My participants negotiate 'appropriate' consumption and hetero-hyper-sexy respectability in this space which positions them quite differently to men. In the young women's accounts of their participation in the 'culture of intoxication', gendered scripts remain, men's excessive drinking is not troubled with a need to be *'in control'* since being drunk is a sign of masculinity. Women, on the other hand, as noted in chapter 5, section 5.4.1, *'cannot drink loads and still retain a good reputation'*.

Constructing themselves as women who *'look nice'* (section 5.3.1) also allows them to consolidate their position as respectable or *'well classy'* (section 5.3.1) through comparison to *'other'* women who were *out-of-control*. This process of 'othering' can be seen as an example of McRobbie's 'spaces of attention', in which the women compete and critique each other through labels that are often used to designate the 'working classes'; and the young women in this study used these classed discourses despite being working-class women

themselves. These discourses could equally be applied to them from other women, so that on nights out the women were equally vulnerable to the powerlessness of being '*othered*'.

It is clear from the women's narratives that as postfeminist subjects they need to be recognisable in terms of male desire which for them involves 'appropriate' modes of femininity, such as doing their hair and wearing high-heeled shoes. At the same time their narratives suggest a kind of 'pre-feminist' patriarchal dominance since in dressing desirably, the women become *too* recognisable in relation to male desire (**too** heterosexual) and this means having to negotiate aspects of male prejudice, control and abuse. For example, at time of data collection very few of the participants had boyfriends or partners/husbands, and many described how their participation in a hypersexual femininity that, I have argued, allowed them to participate in their drinking cultures, was incompatible with having a boyfriend. Many described attempts at control over them exerted by past boyfriends in terms of their appearance and freedom to participate in the NTE.

My analysis extends McRobbie's (2009) theorisation of postfeminist sites, which operate in reinforcing gender differences and gender inequalities, to include the 'culture of intoxication' as a 'space of attention'. The NTE, of which the 'culture of intoxication' is part, is an example of this space within which this particular group of young women, in striving to negotiate contradictory and complex discourses of femininity, compete and critique each other on the basis of consumption. Furthermore, whilst the women talk of the necessity to drink if they wish to socialise (concurring with Griffin 2005), for them, intoxication may be pursued but not necessarily because it represents a 'pleasure' (Measham 2004a, 2004b) or enabled them to articulate the agentic (drinking) identities characterised by postfeminist discourse; rather, the participants' sense making, in this study, is that getting drunk is '*just something everyone does*' and a '*routine*' activity. My analysis thus conceptualises excessive alcohol drinking as prescriptive; an essential part of being someone, for this group of young women, but one with significant risks to be managed and identity dilemmas to be negotiated.

Alcohol is, however, not just a prescriptor, my analysis showed it was also an enabler. In the context of having to dress in sexy and hyper feminine ways, the participants described alcohol as the enabler – the tool that facilitated their ability to carry off their performance of this sexy hyper-femininity. Thus in this section while I have shown that alcohol is prescriptive, in the following section I discuss how it was also constructed as enabling.

8.3.2 Alcohol as Enabler: have young women really ‘never had it so good’?

As I discussed in chapter two, a key theme in western political discourse suggests women ‘have never had it so good’ (Gill and Arthurs 2006:443). Women’s apparent equal participation in public space and ability to take up subjectivities associated with being empowered sexual citizens supports this idea. Furthermore, within postfeminist discourses enacting traditional styles of femininity (such as dressing up, wearing make-up, and ‘doing’ one’s hair) is constructed as the ‘choice’ of an empowered woman pleasing herself and not an obligation for women to make themselves ‘object and prey’ for men (Bartky 2003:101). However, to participate in the NTE women are expected, far more than men, to work on, transform and present themselves as ‘well-groomed, well-governed subjects at the heart of neo-liberal reform’ (Kehily 2008:57).

The women’s narratives in this study highlight how many of the supposed freedoms of contemporary young womanhood, such as drinking excessively, are illusory; they must use ‘technologies of sexiness’ (Evans, Riley, and Shankar 2010, see chapter two) in order to embody a heterosexual confident sexual form of agency, yet they are self-objectifying themselves. The young women’s narratives highlight how a ‘hetero-hyper-sexy’ appearance has become a necessary participatory condition for them within the ‘culture of intoxication’. However, their talk also suggests that whilst this ‘new’ mode of femininity is framed within postfeminist discourses as ‘fun’ (Gill 2007a), it obscures the difficulties ‘real’ women have in measuring up to an idealised and narrowing version of contemporary heterosexual attractiveness; a vision of beauty that excludes those not slim, young, able-bodied, ample-breasted and usually white and middle-class (see Evans, Riley, and Shankar 2010; Gill 2008a; Ringrose and Walkerdine 2008).

As I discussed in chapter two, McRobbie (2009:66) argues that women’s submission to this style of femininity is an ‘invisible authority’, however I would argue that from the women’s accounts, they are fully aware of where these authoritative discourses of idealised ‘sexy’ femininity stem from. Their talk suggests there are no other discourses available from which to do femininity in an increasingly sexualised NTE (Measham and Østergaard 2009), of which the ‘culture of intoxication’ is part, since those who do not participate were constructed as risking ridicule or being derided for not ‘trying’. Or perhaps even more damning, the social reality of doing anything different would render them powerless, unattractive and, consequently, unfeminine.

Additionally Gill, Henwood and McLean (2005) argue that Berger's famous phrase, 'Men look at women, and women watch themselves being looked at' is no longer appropriate since men's bodies are also increasingly presented in idealised and eroticised ways, and this, some might argue, is for the female gaze and desire. Gill and colleagues show how, despite today's emphasis on individual freedom and autonomy, men discipline and police their own and other men's bodies and identities; similarly, for women it's supposedly no longer about the male gaze, but about 'pleasing themselves' and a self-policing narcissistic gaze. I would suggest that Berger's quote remains relevant, but this study indicates that additional layers of complexity need to be added in relation to the female gaze which I argue is paramount in theorising women's objectification/subjectification in contemporary cultures.

Much of my participants' talk articulates a strong sense of being on 'display', constructing a sense of being under the gaze, since '*doing looks*' and '*being noticed*' are their reasons for enacting this 'hetero-hyper-sexy' femininity (see chapter 6, section 6.2.2). Often this 'display' is for the male gaze, within which they must negotiate 'walking a fine line' between *looking* sexually attractive but not sexually promiscuous, so as to be both sexually attractive and respectable. As I highlighted in chapter two, a number of feminists (e.g., McRobbie 2009; Gill 2009d) talk about the idea that women construct a sexy femininity for a self-policing narcissistic gaze and, at the same time, they *just so happen* to attract the necessary male recognition confirming they are desirable; however, they do not mention the gaze of *other* women. My participants' narratives, on the other hand, do identify the gaze of other women as a significant site for postfeminist identity formation, so that dressing up is for 'oneself', for men (if in a 'look don't touch' way) and for other women.

Although few analysts talk about looks between women, my study shows how a particular group of young women constitute this form of 'postfeminist female gaze', particularly in the 'culture of intoxication', as far more powerful and important than the male gaze. I extend Gill's theorisation of self-objectification to include not only women's internalisation of the male gaze but a judgemental 'female gaze' which my participants described as significant and powerful; as Posh explains, '*I think girls can do more damage than a bloke can (.) to your confidence*' (p.194).

The participants in this study articulated a 'female gaze' that, acting like a mirror, is internalised as a reflection of themselves. Whilst Gill argues that the increasingly narrow representations of female beauty and sex appeal are responsible for excluding all women unable to live up to these normatively required ideals (see chapter two), I extend the workings of exclusivity to include the female gaze. The female gaze was described by the

participants as having the power to 'make' or 'break' you in its appraisal; it has the potential to bolster or undermine a woman's confidence in herself as an appropriately respectable and sexy feminine subject. And whilst my analysis shows how the power of the female gaze operates in a similar way to the narrow ideals of femininity for excluding women, here exclusion was often class-based, and works on competitiveness and female envy. Unlike their middle-class counterparts (and men), my participants described not having the freedom not to 'care' about what they look like and how they behave in the 'culture of intoxication' (e.g., Dora's talk of middle-class female university students). Instead, the participants constructed themselves as women who must concern themselves with making sure that nothing about their appearance is left to chance to try and ensure that the attention they receive from other women will confirm they are 'doing it right'. Yet despite the work these participants put into their appearance, they remained vulnerable to the appraising '*up and down look*' of the female gaze, which was constructed as evoking strong anxieties in the women.

The women's (mis)recognition through the female gaze can be partially resolved through the female 'collective'; in the context of 'nights out' within an all-female group, friendship and togetherness act as a mechanism through which female (sexual) subjectivities are secured; a sense of belonging and 'sameness' in terms of appearance enables female group members, as individuals, to partially escape this damaging postfeminist 'female gaze'. Nonetheless, the postfeminist idea that women are completely free agents who just 'please themselves' cannot explain why the look these young women seek to achieve is so similar (e.g., 'sameness'). Again, whilst it is argued that this is due to the growing homogeneity organised around socially constructed ideals of hyper-sexualised forms of femininity (see Gill 2009d; McRobbie 2009), I also point to the power of female gaze which polices and disciplines any woman who dares rebel.

In this context, alcohol becomes not just the prescriptor – the requirement for these young women if they want to socially 'exist', it also becomes an enabler: drinking while getting dressed facilitates not just the social dynamics but creates confidence to dare to participate in hypersexual femininity – to meet the female gaze and be found not wanting but winning. For example, the participants describe their alcohol drinking as something that starts as soon as they get home from work and begin getting ready to go out: '*it all starts at 5 o'clock*' (e.g., Velma, p. 209). Drinking alcohol before they go out enables many of the participants to wear the obligatory 'sexy' outfit (Tracey, p. 187), necessary for attracting attention, but it also helps to mask any insecurity or lack of confidence they might have in receiving this attention. As Velma explains, she could not go out '*stone cold sober, all dressed up*' because she is '*so self-conscious*' knowing everybody is looking at her (Velma, p. 187).

Drinking also enables some of the young women to '*stop caring*' about being on show (e.g., Sienna, p. 180), or to reconceptualise themselves as meeting cultural ideals of beauty; for example, Boo talked about how alcohol let her feel like a beautiful woman even though she was physically big: '*after seven drinks I feel like Kate Moss, I'm not fat anymore*' (p.207).

The women's accounts of the female gaze do highlight what McRobbie (2009) refers to as a 'double entanglement' of anti-feminist and feminist themes (see chapter two). On the one hand they talk about the importance of supporting each other, using a discourse of '*togetherness*' in constructing nights out in the NTE ('*it's amazing what we can do*' p. 228). Yet, on the other hand, it would seem that living in a neoliberal society which values individualism, they must also enact an individualistic 'sexual entrepreneurialism' which relies on intrasexual (female) competition. Interlinking the two constructions of alcohol, prescriptor and enabler, I extend McRobbie's (2009) theorisation of 'spaces of attention' further in suggesting that this is not only a competition in which the young women in this study vie for a place in what seems like a female postfeminist hierarchy, but one that also re-inscribes them back within the dominance of a male patriarchy. But, this intrasexual (female) competition also highlights how the women's talk constructs their participation in highly stylised modes of femininity as not choiceful; rather, their talk adds further weight to the idea that 'doing it for yourself' has become a new obligation to craft and display a particular hetero-hyper-sexualised form of femininity.

Media analysis research (e.g., Gill 2003, 2009d; Lazar 2006) points to the 'doing it for yourself' discourses which women have to do, but in doing empirical work with these young women, I also show that women who are making sense of themselves through postfeminism are also able to articulate how hard and painful it is. The young women describe how making sense of the 'hetero-hyper-sexy' idealised identity is, for them, inescapable, and 'bringing into being', using technologies of sexiness, requires agency but dedication too. For this particular group of young women, their accounts of their experiences of becoming sexy, independent, and 'empowered' highlight just how isolating and brutal it is for them. Academics say it's sold as freedom but actually it's hard work, and these women do not need an academic to tell them – they know it; yet they are still caught in the contradiction of postfeminist sentiment.

8.2.3 Alcohol as Provocateur: '*Girls just wanna (gotta) have fun*'?

Whilst intrasexual (female) competition is not surprising in a culture driven by neoliberal ideas of individualism, entrepreneurialism and refuting feminist values, the women's

accounts of 'nights out' in the context of girls-only friendship groups, can be seen as a 'sisterhood', which is a key theme in the rhetoric of feminism emphasising solidarity and power. Alternatively, it can be seen as a form of 'girl power' in which the young women in this study talk about 'nights out' together as a practice in which they feel a sense of 'fun' and empowerment (e.g., Sheehan and Ridge 2001).

Nonetheless, whilst the young women's sense of 'fun' is often constructed as coming from doing 'dressing up' and drinking *together*, it does not negate the sense that this discourse of 'fun' has a 'doubled' meaning; the flip side is that 'fun' is something the women must participate in if they want to socialise, and this means alcohol drinking and excessive consumption to enact hetero-hyper-sexy' feminine subjectivity. Thus, for many women, 'fun' is both an opportunity and an obligation in the context of a hyper-sexualised culture of intoxication; as I argued in chapter seven, they might '*wanna have fun*', but really they '*gotta have fun*'.

Furthermore, as I discussed in chapter two, third-wave feminists have sought to embrace traditional concepts of femininity and everything 'girlie'; incorporating a girl-power ideology in their efforts to construct a new kind of feminist politics (e.g., Baumgardner and Richards 2000). Nonetheless, it is a feminism which embraces commercial media visibility; and one that celebrates the power that comes with it. Representations and greater visibility of women in all forms of media suggest empowerment; yet it is not just the commercial persuasiveness of the image, connecting power with consumption, but the idea that women are active producers of their own culture. These accounts construct women are freely *choosing* to enact femininities on the basis that they are 'pleasing themselves', and just so happen to attract the male gaze (Gill 2009d). However, this does not explain why some of the women in this study feel unable to 'go out' in public without a *full on* appearance; for example, high-heeled shoes, fake tan, revealing clothes, excessive make-up etc.

A '*full on*' (hyper-sexualised) appearance is a 'technology of sexiness' (Evans, Riley, and Shankar 2010) which the women in this study construct to create for themselves a sexual entrepreneur subject position. And while both my analysis above and the writing of other authors about postfeminism I discuss (see chapter two) highlight the ways obligation to enact hyper-sexualised femininity is presented through discourses of pleasure and power, being 'knowing sexual entrepreneurs' is difficult; tensions arise between the prescriptive elements of new sexual subjectivities and the construction of participation as a matter of pleasure and choice.

My analysis also highlights some of the ways in which my participants made sense of participating in hyper-sexy excessive drinking cultures, as both pleasurable and

empowering, through discourses such as '*agent provocateur*' and the '*bar-lesque*'. My findings show how, as '*agent provocateur*', excessive alcohol is constructed as giving the women confidence, and whilst alcohol has always been used to help promote social confidence, making it easier to attract and talk to members of the opposite sex, what is different here is it is being used to excess within a culture of hypersexuality. Many of the women in this study describe that to do what, for them, is normative femininity, to visibly perform a hyper-sexualised mode of femininity in public, means needing to drink alcohol excessively; so that as they get dressed together they construct their alcohol consumption as working to fuel their daring, encouraging each other and themselves to take up and perform hyper feminine sexual subjectivities. In other words, alcohol is not only an enabler, facilitating confidence to participate in being 'on show' in the NTE, but in excess, alcohol incites the performance of hypersexualised subjectivity in public, something many of the young women in this study find this hard to do, while simultaneously celebrating their ability to do so.

Furthermore, it is the venues within the NTE that become the spaces for the women's 'visibility' and recognition (e.g., the '*bar-lesque*'). I showed how, in representing the '*bar-lesque*' as a heterosexual 'erotic market', these young women with access to hetero-normative ideals of 'sexually attractive' yet respectable femininity, traded on their 'erotic capital' (Hakim 2010) to manipulate the marketplace. A number of the women described how the combination of excessive alcohol consumption and their 'erotic capital' allowed them to do risk; alcohol enabled them to enact culturally valued femininities necessary for VIP access to London clubs (see section 7.4 p. 216), but also enabled them to play and perform this hypersexualised subjectivity with the help of the expensive free drinks the clubs provided. Excessive alcohol also enabled the young women to, as part of an all-female group, 'terrorise' boys (see section 7.5.2 p. 228). Nonetheless, their performances were inevitably for men, and reiterated the intrasexual (female) competition for the male gaze that underpins the necessity to 'look' sexy and practice sexiness.

8.4 Contribution to postfeminist theory

Postfeminism, as I described in chapter two, is a term used to signal a wide of range of meanings. But rather than see it necessarily as a theoretical orientation, or as a new moment of feminism, or as backlash, I have drawn on McRobbie and Gill's conceptualisation of postfeminism as a sentiment that is fraught with difficulties, contradictions and impossibilities, the analysis of which highlights how daily life may be conceptualised as a

process of working through a series of endless dilemmas. I thus explored these ideas in the realm of alcohol drinking in the NTE; and in my analysis I identified three ways of constructing alcohol in the context of the NTE, postfeminism, neoliberalism and consumerism as described above. These ways of constructing alcohol allowed me to explore some of the sense-making that frames this group of women's participation in 'prescriptor', 'enabler', and 'provocateur', and within these constructions I also identified a series of contradictions in relation to alcohol and femininity. The three constructions of alcohol are valuable in themselves, nonetheless, they can also be used to develop previous work that has highlighted the dilemmatic nature of postfeminism by examining the contradictions within the three constructions of alcohol I have identified. For example, Griffin (2005:1) says 'femininity, in some contexts, operates as an impossible space to occupy', and in my analysis of a group of women's sense making of their participation in the 'culture of intoxication' my thesis shows what some of these impossible dilemmas/spaces may be for those who participate in the NTE and hyper-sexualised femininity.

Within each of the three constructions of alcohol I identified contradictions which link 'directly with struggle, power and the deconstruction of discourse in practice' (Parker 2004:165). For example, when talking about alcohol as a prescriptor I identified the following dilemma: to be '*soberly drunk*'; in relation to alcohol as enabler the participants talked about the dilemmas associated with being a '*sassy lady*', '*looking for Mr Right by dressing like Mrs Wrong*' and '*modern equality meets gendered drinking*' in which the young women struggle with postfeminist discourses of equality and the enduring patriarchal double standard; and for alcohol as provocateur, '*erotic (dis)empowerment*' in which the women's talk highlights the dilemma of erotic capital as empowering yet censoring. My thesis also shows how these contradictions have subsequent consequences in the young women's accounts; for example, within the three constructions of alcohol, the women talk of looking for Mr Right, yet their prescriptive participation in excessive drinking leaves no space '*to participate and have a boyfriend*' and a sense that no matter what they do they will '*never getting it right*'.

I elaborate on these contradictions and consequences in detail:

8.4.1 'Soberly drunk'

The issue for the young women in this study is that they must drink excessively to socialise, but they must also remain respectable by not looking drunk; this creates the dilemma, or contradiction, of needing to be '*soberly drunk*' (p.161). In other words, trying to be 'in control' (soberly drunk), as a strategy for maintaining

feminine respectability, when intoxication, or as Lipsy puts it, '*getting pissed*' (p. 205), creates a lack of control ('determined drunkenness' Measham 2006).

8.4.2 'Sassy Lady'

The young women in this study use discourses such as the 'lady' and 'girly-girl', in constructing their 'ideal' femininity, as a way of providing them with a position/space from which to drink whilst avoiding the risk of being seen as a 'ladette'. Discursively constructing themselves as a 'lady' (p. 154) is also a way of maintaining a good 'reputation' (e.g., based on sexual propriety see Friedan 1963). Nonetheless, these discourses clash with the competing neoliberal postfeminist demands of (hetero) hypersexual femininity (the requirement for women to be feisty, sassy, sexually-agentic, and successful; e.g., Gill 2007a, 2008b, 2009d). The young women's accounts not only suggest that the sexual double standard is still apparent in today's drinking cultures, but, as a particular group of working-class women, combining successful (in terms of not being overlooked) sassiness and sexiness, as an interpretation of 'classiness', is precarious and contradictory; and requires a very difficult balancing act. It would seem that for these young women, they must both dress like respectable ladies and be sexy and sassy, two incompatible requirements that lead to a range of discursive strategies including labelling other women as getting it wrong and being too sexual (e.g., '*like prostitutes*' Amelie, p.216); constructing clothing choices as not agentic (e.g., '*you have to dress*' [*like a slut*] Amelie, p.216); or attempting to take up contradictory subject positions such as the sassy lady, who is both not sexual enough to be respectable while also being sexual enough to be considered as acceptably participating in the required hypersexualised femininity of the night-time economies in which they participate.

8.4.3 Looking for 'Mr Right' by dressing like 'Mrs Wrong'

Whilst not all the women in this study constructed their hyper-sexualised feminine look as purposely for the male gaze, some of the women talked about dressing up and looking nice to meet Mr. Right: '*the man of your dreams*' (India, p.220). The women use a romance discourse in talking about meeting potential partners, and for them appearing attractive and desirable was paramount. However, they also talk about ex-boyfriends' disapproval of their participation in the NTE (see section 5.5, p.168), with the women constructing hypersexual femininity as appropriate for 'going

out', whilst their boyfriends constructed it as 'inappropriate' femininity. As such looking for Mr. Right is contradictory, since participating in the NTE requires a hypersexual feminine appearance and often alcohol to perform (*'provocateur'*); and taking up these practices contradictorily constructs them as not Mrs Right.

8.4.4 Modern equality meets gendered drinking

The participants' talk highlighted the enduring patriarchal double standard which surrounds these young women's excessive drinking in the NTE creating contradictions and inconsistencies. For example, Lipsy argues (p. 205) that *'the stereotype thing'* is that *'girls are supposed to be girls'* and are *'not allowed to get as pissed'* as men. Lipsy points out that she and her friends often do get drunk and this *'should be a girl's thing'* because they pay the same tax as men and should therefore have the same equality (a classic postfeminist move). Nonetheless, Lipsy constructs being loud and getting drunk as a male practice rather than a 'girl's thing', and this contradiction suggests that perhaps there is no alternative/available discourse from which to do femininity. As Griffin et al. (2006) argue, rather than treat femininity as having a dominant stereotypical form (which women can conform to or resist), it would be more productive to view femininity as an impossible space for young women to occupy successfully (Griffin 2005); and this difficulty (impossibility) can be seen in Lipsy's talk. There is 'no clear-cut representation of appropriate femininity to which these young women might aspire (or reject); rather, contemporary femininity is constituted through a series of multiple and frequently competing discourses' (Griffin et al. 2006:7).

8.4.5 Erotic dis/empowerment

In chapter seven I discussed the ideas of 'erotic power', and how the young women's use of femininity to get what they want can be seen as a move towards postfeminist self-pleasure as well as 'classic' feminine power (e.g., 'bar-lesque'; 'no strip, just tease'; 'erotic capital'). Nonetheless, this construction of erotic power is censured empowerment; it is only available to women who 'fit' the criteria of erotic capital (i.e., those women who might be able to comply with the narrow ideals of beauty) and it seems to lock these women into a sense of valuing themselves as commodities (in terms of their sexual desirability). In this context, the idea of female empowerment is conditional since the women can only participate by exploiting their own sexuality.

This supports McRobbie's concept of the postfeminist masquerade in which 'women are currently disempowered through the very discourses of empowerment they are being offered as substitutes for feminism' (McRobbie 2009:49). In other words, for the young women, a sense of empowerment because they can participate in new sexual subjectivities is simultaneously a form of disempowerment because their value becomes solely located in their appearance.

My thesis thus shows some of the contradictions experienced in the 'impossible space' in which women who participate in hyper-sexualised drinking cultures negotiate. As I show in the section below, in highlighting the contradictory nature of the participants' sense making, some of the consequences of taking up postfeminist discourses and participating in the night-time economy for this group of young women are exposed. These include not being able to participate in their social lives and have a boyfriend and a sense of never being able to get it right.

8.4.6 *Not being able to participate and have a boyfriend*

For the women in this study, one of the consequences of taking up postfeminist discourses of hypersexual femininity and participating in the NTE, which often involves drinking excessively, is that there is no space for any alternative identity such as 'girlfriend'. In chapter five the women talked about men not wanting to 'date' a woman who drinks, and a woman who does drink is often regarded as being 'one of the lads'. Summer, Dora and Velma suggest a discourse of powerlessness in trying to negotiate having a boyfriend with their desire to go out socialising (p.169). Subjected to 'boyfriend' dominance and a form of (hetero)sexual coercion (Gavey 1992; Livingston et al. 2004), the women's sense of oneself as individualistic, autonomous consumers enjoying the freedoms of the 'postfeminist' moment are undermined by their partners' manipulation and constraint.

The women talk about their previous partners' disapproval of their drinking and their appearance when they go out, and this again adds weight to my suggestion that a woman's postfeminist 'sexiness' is precarious; the pressure on women to conform to the fashion/beauty complex is complicated by a kind of postfeminist patriarchal dominance since, in dressing desirably (and drinking excessively), they become too heterosexual in relation to male desire and risk being seen as sluts. As Terry says, '*you can't drink loads, behave how you like and still retain a good reputation*' (p.170),

and for many of the women in this study this means having to make the choice between participating in the NTE or having a boyfriend.

8.4.7 *The sense of never getting it right*

It would seem, from the women's narratives in this study, that no matter what they do, they can never get it right. In 1982 Christine Griffin argued that the dichotomy between "good" and "bad" women was not a straightforward ideological division which can be negotiated; it is a profound *contradiction* in which young women always lose, whatever they do' (Griffin 2007 [1982]:556). Reproducing a hypersexual femininity, constructed in postfeminist discourse as powerful and pleasurable, is hard work and the young women's talk in this study highlights how they can never get it right. No matter how much attention they pay to their appearance they are always vulnerable to being positioned as a problem: '*we have to keep a level up of ourselves (.) you have to think of everything*', Tracey, p.198). The women are acutely aware that the sexual double standard and the division between 'good' girls and 'bad' or 'slutty' ones still exists, yet it seems more complicated now. The women talk about working and earning money which supposedly means they have the same right to participate in the culture of intoxication as men; but on whose terms? They do not want to be identified as 'one of the lads', nor do they want to figure as a 'drunken slut'; they must look and act agentically 'sexy' and be always 'up for it', even though they are not (e.g., '*a lot of blokes take that as 'yep come on' (.) but I couldn't be further from that*', Velma, p.222), yet at the same time, maintain a respectable 'good' sexual reputation.

The contradictions I and others have identified thus create a context in which the young women in this study could never get a sense of being right, but were always vulnerable to being the *other*.

8.5 *Concluding comments: strengths and limitations of the study, future research, and a critical reflection of the theoretical framework of the project*

Moving beyond the static, binary positions that locate these young women as either savvy sexual agents or objectified sexualised victims, my research shows the role excessive drinking has for performing 'sexy' and managing the complexities of a context in which enduring forms of patriarchal power fold into postfeminist discourse. The women in this

study can and do manage to participate in postfeminist discourses of femininity within the dilemmatic and contradictory context of drinking in the NTE; yet whilst ‘fitting’ one set of ideals (e.g., young, slim, beautiful, white etc.), they do not ‘fit’ others (e.g., being working-class not middle-class) and their narratives provide the reader with a sense of melancholy. The women describe trying to be successful at something impossible creating a context in which they can never get it right. This has key policy implications, particularly since potential outcomes constructed the experience as damaging and brutal. For example, Tracey talked of ‘*it makes me feel terrible*’, and I think “*God I’m never going out*” (p.181) and at other times she described trying suicide because she felt ‘*unattractive*’ (p.222), and Terry talked about wearing ‘flats’ which made her feel ‘*incredibly unsexy and not very feminine*’ (p.195); a failing in some way because she is comparing herself to ‘*every single girl*’ who, it seems, are wearing high heels. Posh also talks about the ‘*damage*’ other women are capable of, and this is in terms of the critical female gaze; and she describes her strategy for ‘*damage*’ limitation as trying ‘*to look the best*’ (p.194).

I argue that this sense of lacking and inability to get it right are reinforced by British media and government alcohol health campaigns, which as I discussed in chapter three, have tried to use fear tactics to prevent women drinking to excess; using references such as ‘shame’ and ‘respectability’, their gendered view of ‘binge-drinking’ reinforces the sexual double-standard surrounding young women and overlooks that some women see alcohol as ‘fundamentally fun and pleasurable’ (Sheehan and Ridge 2001:358), but also, as my thesis shows, as simply essential to participating in the social cultures in which they are in. Such campaigns therefore may be considered to reinforce negative discourses while ignoring the enabling functions of alcohol, in terms of allowing these women to participate in their social lives (and to thus socially exist), to take up some of the few available discourses they have to construct themselves as valuable (because they are able to perform sexy, ideal femininities), and to either enjoy the thrill of being the provocateur or inoculate themselves against the critical female gaze.

8.5.1 Strengths, limitations and future research

One of the major contributions of this research is that it offers an in-depth analysis of a group of young white working-class women who are able to participate in (hetero)-hypersexual femininity and the British NTE. This is the result of ethnographic research over three years and partly because of my relationship and rapport with the young women involved in the study. As I discussed in chapter four, taking an ethnographic approach, involving a range of

methods, enabled me to explore the lives of my female participants, putting their talk in context and allowing them to develop (i.e., sharing and reflecting more themselves as they developed a relationship with me). My methods for collecting data meant I had direct and sustained contact with participants and within the context of their social lives; watching what was happening, listening to what was said, asking questions, and producing a richly written account, whilst acknowledging and respecting the irreducibility of the women's experiences together with the role of theory and my own role in the study.

One of the advantages of poststructuralist discourse analysis is exploring how a group of young women make sense of themselves in the dilemmatic and contradictory context of postfeminism, neoliberalism and consumerism, and the 'culture of intoxication' in which I bring my analysis of the women's alcohol drinking practices and their discursive constructions of postfeminist identities together. And, in exploring the contradictions and functions of discourses, what the consequences are for the women in taking up this sense-making for subjectivity.

In exploring how a group of young women negotiated the dilemmatic and contradictory context of postfeminism, neoliberalism and consumerism within the context of extreme drinking, class emerged as a central theme in my analysis. As discussed in chapter four, I had not predicted the homogeneity of the participants, and while this has been an advantage in terms of being able to explore the consequences for a group of women in taking up certain discourses (such as looking for Mr Right while being Mrs Wrong), it meant that I had not considered how these young women were negotiating their classed location to be a key factor when designing my interview schedules. Thus while I have rich data on how the young women's classed positions shaped their relationships to postfeminist discourse and the culture of intoxication, I did not raise any specific questions about class and this presents a limitation of this study as I was not able to examine class in greater depth.

Similarly, I could have explored the impact of the rurality of my participants' location in more detail. For example, Amelie talked about a girl she knew who was a lesbian and loosely connected to her friendship group, but she left the area and went on to art school before 'coming out', severing, or was severed, all connections with her 'old' friends and locality. Thus, those who live in less rural/small town contexts may have access to other discourses that would facilitate analysis on what is or is not available to my participants. Future research could extend this study to explore the impact of living in a small community on the participants; for example, how does the small community/rurality impact on the compulsory hyper feminine heterosexuality in which they perform and participate in their social lives. Questions also remain on the role of alcohol – what, for example, are the limits to its

provocateur status, must it always be folded back into normative heterosexuality or can it be used to take up other subject positions, and if so, what are the consequences for doing so?

A further limitation of this research was in terms of ethnography. As discussed in chapter four, while I was invited by my participants to join them for nights out, there was an expectation that I would leave at some point. I was thus always an 'outsider' looking in. And in hindsight perhaps a more ethnographic approach might have been to explore the women's participation in the British NTE by training up the young women to be their own ethnographers, which would blur the outsider/insider position.

In addition, there are also avenues for future research based on parts of this ethnographic study which have not yet been fully analysed and would warrant further analysis/investigation. One example, is the visibly provocative 'performances' of female-female touching and kissing that my participants engaged in (see chapter 7, p. 212); this opens up a new line of enquiry in exploring the power relations that operate in constructing this form of 'commodified eroticism'.

Furthermore, I would like to explore how the young women's sense making has changed or stayed the same as they move into adulthood (their last interviews were some two years ago).

8.5.2 Critical reflection of theoretical framework of the project

Poststructuralism has been criticised for seeing the individual's world merely as a linguistic and discursive construction. Whilst I have taken a poststructuralist approach in this study, which has been useful since from a Foucauldian perspective I was interested in the availability of discursive resources within drinking cultures, and the implications for women in taking them up. Thus I am embedding the reader into the culture even though this study is not a traditional ethnographic project involving case studies. However, this approach does not explore the in-depth experiences of individuals and the emotions involved. In contrast, Eatough and Smith (2008:184) argue that language represents only a partial account of what people are doing when they communicate, and for interpretative phenomenological analysis (IPA) 'lived life with its many vicissitudes is much more than historically situated linguistic interactions between people'. For example, emotions and emotionality are not simply language games and/or an effect of discourse; as Chodorow (1999:165) says, 'even emotion words and emotional concepts must have individual resonance and personal meaning'.

Taking a poststructuralist approach did enable me to look at the young women's sense-making and theorise the structure of this sense-making in terms of what they could say, think and do (Burr 2003). What we do not get is the women's lived experiences, and given the vulnerabilities identified had I taken a phenomenological perspective I might have gleaned more in regard to the nature of the emotional lived experience of postfeminism.

Nonetheless, for the most part I am happy to be able to offer a critical reflection of how a group of young women are trying to negotiate what I have shown as a contradictory and almost impossible space; and how these women have, in many ways and in conditions not of their own making, sought to transform themselves into culturally ideal feminine subjects and in the process have fun.

8.6 Conclusion

The 'culture of intoxication' has provided an important context in which to explore how a group of young women take up discourses of postfeminism. This research contributes towards postfeminist theory and our understanding of the ways in which (classed) postfeminist subjectivities are reproduced and made sense of in the context of alcohol drinking and doing femininity. Alcohol use is prescriptive; the young women in this study experienced alcohol drinking as something they have to do to 'exist' socially. Alcohol is also an enabler; enabling the young women to relax or let go of their inhibitions in order to participate in hypersexual femininity, which was normative for the NTE and counter-balanced their drinking masculine/feminine dilemma. Alcohol is also a provocateur; it allowed the young women to take risks and negotiate new sexual subjectivities, experiencing themselves as able to take up ideal discourses of femininity – and to feel like Kate Moss.

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